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Refugees

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C O N T E N T S

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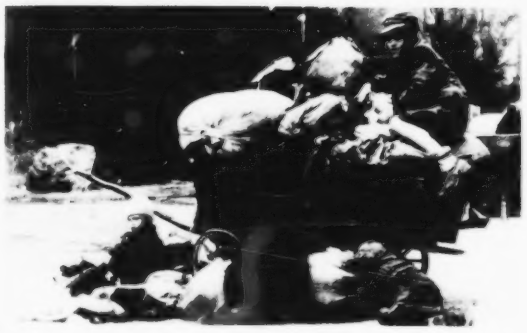

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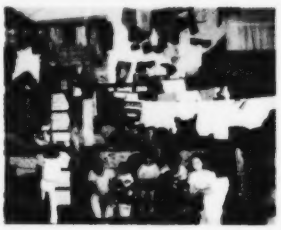


The new Refugees

UNHCR and the 1951 Convention mark their 40th anniversaries this year. With 17 million refugees living in misery around the world today, we have no reason to celebrate. But because some 28 million other refugees have been given the chance to begin new lives since 1951, we thought it appropriate to dedicate this issue to the 40th Anniversary Year.

We decided to give **"Refugees"** a facelift and to ask some close friends to tell us the truth about our wrinkles. We appreciate their frankness.

There are several innovations in the new format. A large section of the magazine is devoted to updating ongoing OPERATIONS and unveiling new ones. A section focused on ISSUES will take an in-depth look at refugee questions from diverse points of view.

Added features include "A View from the Press Gallery" by guest journalists who cover UNHCR, and "A Day in the Life ..." We would appreciate contributions from the field, from both UNHCR staffers and our NGO partners, for the latter and would appreciate a photograph of the author in action.

Another change is the creation of an Editorial Board, made up of individuals who are sensitive to the concerns that surround refugee issues but who also are aware that refugee problems will never be solved if we pretend they do not exist.

READEX FICHE

Aquino award to UNHCR

Philippine President Corazon Aquino presented the first Ninoy Aquino Refugee Award for Outstanding Service to Humanity to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees during ceremonies in Manila.

The August 20 presentation of the award coincided with celebrations in the Philippines marking UNHCR's 40th anniversary. It also came on the eve of the eighth anniversary of the assassination of President Aquino's husband, Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, who was gunned down Aug. 21, 1983, upon his return to Manila from exile in the United States.

S.S. Wijeratne, UNHCR representative for the Philippines, accepted the award on behalf of UNHCR. Wijeratne noted that President Aquino, her late husband and several members of her government had themselves been refugees. "Mrs. Aquino has had a chance to lead her country and make a historical contribution as a former refugee whose name will forever be synonymous with democracy in the Philippines," Wijeratne said. "The symbol of freedom Ninoy Aquino represents for refugees and free men has been kept alive by his wife."

Cyclists aid refugees in Kenya

Three Kenyan bicyclists, including one UNHCR staff member, braved hyenas and high temperatures to raise money for UNHCR in a 500-km. sprint from Nairobi to the port city of Mombasa in July.

The three men raised more than 200,000 Kenyan shillings ($7,017) in contributions during their ride.

"It's a very dangerous route to Mombasa," said UNHCR Representative Sylvester Awuye. "Hyenas, monkeys and baboons cross the highway. It was rough going and very tiring."

Two recent graduates from Kenya's Moi University, Maina Nderitu and Joe Kibe, approached the UNHCR branch office with the idea. UNHCR staffer Geoffrey Wambuga agreed to accompany the two during the sometimes lonely race to the Indian Ocean port.

"They have made our people aware of the plight of the refugees who are among us," said Kenyan Home Affairs Minister D.N. Kuguru in a Nairobi ceremony honoring the three cyclists.

The minister said the three braved "very dangerous and trying moments to achieve their aim of raising funds to assist our fellow men who have been displaced because of civil strife in their own countries." Kenya hosts some 60,000 refugees, including 54,500 Somalis, 5,000 Ethiopians and 2,000 Rwandese.

Ogata to accept Asturias award

High Commissioner Sadako Ogata will travel to Oviedo, Spain, on October 18 to accept the 1991 *Fundacion Principe de Asturias* prize, awarded in recognition of UNHCR's work on behalf of people persecuted for their race, religion, nationality or political opinions.

"This award will be a great help to UNHCR in its efforts to ensure that the voices of 17 million refugees are heard," Mrs. Ogata said when told of the pesetas 5 million ($47,169) award. "It comes at a time when the Office is facing unprecedented challenges."

Announcing the award, the *Fundacion Principe de Asturias* said governments must cooperate to solve the "grave problems that afflict the millions of refugees around the world." The 11-year-old foundation expressed its confidence in UNHCR's humanitarian work, "which has acquired new momentum with the arrival of Sadako Ogata."

The award is recognized as the equivalent of the Nobel Prize in the Ibero-American community. The foundation gives priority to individuals and institutions who serve the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking world in areas of international cooperation, science, technology, arts, communications, sports and the humanities.

Henriette Taviani remembered

Henriette Taviani, a dedicated supporter of the right to asylum and an unfailing advocate of UNHCR, died in Paris on August 10. She was 67.

Taviani, formerly UNHCR representative to France, joined UNHCR in 1959 after working as a reporter with Radio France and as an English teacher in Paris.

She was a well-known advocate of the right to asylum during a period when the number of asylum-seekers rose dramatically, and along with it public intolerance.

Gilbert Jaeger, UNHCR's former director of international protection, remembered Taviani as a true example of dedication and professionalism. "Henriette Taviani was among the women and men who have made UNHCR an important institution of refugee protection and assistance," Jaeger said. "She demonstrated that the term civil servant doesn't mean bureaucrat."

Taviani was posted to UNHCR's Paris office in the early 1960s. After being named UNHCR representative to the Palais de l'Elysee in 1972, she also began to assist the new organization, France Terre d'Asile. After her retirement from UNHCR in 1985, she joined the group and served as its president until April of this year, when she stepped down because of illness.

As part of her advocacy efforts on behalf of refugees, she was a member of the Prime Minister's National Committee on Human Rights, president of the Committee to Safeguard the Right to Asylum, and a supporter of the journal, "Documentation Refugiés."

MESSAGE FROM THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

UNHCR/E. Brissaud

Throughout the world the refugee situation is rapidly evolving, more rapidly, in fact, than any of us could have foreseen. While some refugee situations are being resolved or are on the verge of resolution, the prospect of all too many new and more complex mass movements loom.

As UNHCR enters its fifth decade, we are confronted by myriad questions for which there are no facile answers. The scope and interpretation of our mandate must be discussed in the light of the new realities in the world around us.

If we are committed to finding truly durable solutions, can we avoid looking at the question of development? When we speak of "root causes" of population outflows, can we skirt the thorny subject of human rights abuses? How can we best promote liberal asylum policies while recognizing the legitimate immigration control concerns of governments?

In order to place the refugee issue on the international agenda where it belongs, it is vital that we confront these questions in an open and direct manner. For this reason, I have asked **"Refugees"** to solicit diverse viewpoints on refugee matters and to turn its pages into a forum for active debate on the serious refugee topics we face as we edge into the 21st Century.

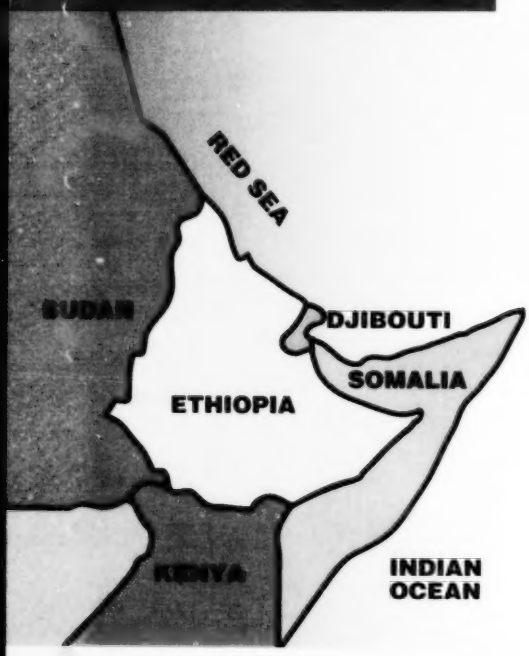
Some of the opinions expressed in this and forthcoming issues of **"Refugees"** will conform to the official views of my Office. Others may not. I hope both will stimulate discussion and help us all to address forcefully the plight of refugees as well as the political, financial and operational factors affecting the activities of UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies. And, I hope the ensuing debate will help UNHCR find innovative ways of seizing the opportunities and facing the challenges that await us during our fifth decade.

Sadako Ogata

OPERATIONS

AN END TO EXILE?

HORN OF AFRICA



The "hunger season" has begun in the Horn of Africa. Weeks before the November harvest, food supplies began running out. The harvest itself, ravaged by drought and armies, will be a bitter one. For tens of millions of people - and for UNHCR - this year's "hunger season" will be very long indeed.

The collapse of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia and the overthrow of the government in Somalia caused massive and often tragic population movements. But the two events also brought a semblance of peace to the Horn, sparking hopes that UNHCR would be able to launch one of the most massive repatriation operations in its history. Euphoria permeated field offices and the camps - finally, a durable solution was in sight for up to 2.2 million people.

But first the aftermath of long civil wars had to be confronted. Fearing reprisals from the new Ethiopian government, tens of thousands of former soldiers, government officials, students and an assortment of civilians had fled to neighboring lands.

In addition, the terrors of war forced most of the 400,000 Sudanese refugees out of their Ethiopian camps and into some of the most appalling conditions ever seen in the history of the Office.

Drought, war and destruction in Somalia drove 357,000 Ethiopians from the refugee camps they, tragically, had called home for many years and thrust them back into the inhospitable Ogaden.

In just four months, between February and June this year, the lives of nearly 1 million people were shattered forcing them to seek refuge ... most for the second time.

The obstacles

Congested ports, a shortage of trucks and aircraft and precarious security made the movement of food and medicines to those most in need a daily nightmare.

Hungry people resorted to banditry – attacking relief convoys and looting warehouses. Roads in several locations were closed for days on end and often the only way to move food was with expensive airlifts.

The scope of the security problem was brought home to all agencies when an ICRC plane hit a landmine during a food airlift in Sudan. The plane was destroyed and four crew members were injured.

And, in an isolated act of violence that dealt a terrible blow to the relief effort in eastern Ethiopia, the popular Gunnar Olsen of CARE was killed. Olsen was pivotal to the extremely difficult and dangerous operations to supply water to the parched camps around Jijiga.

Logistics experts say there is plenty of food in the pipeline but too often that pipeline is clogged and too little food actually reaches those who need it. And when it does arrive, it may be spoiled or infested.

The logistics headache was exacerbated by weak coordination and cooperation among government departments and UN and other agencies. Relief operations often were suffocated by the "red tape" demands of local authorities.

"Organization, logistics and security are the biggest problems," said nutritionist Rita Bhatia. "There's too much food in storage and in the ports and too little in the camps. The food just isn't moving fast enough. If the situation does not improve drastically, we'll be facing another catastrophe.

"Doctors and nutritionists can do nothing to save lives if these issues are not addressed," she said.

Logistics problems, which earlier this year led to over-stocking at some camps while others a few kilometers away received nothing, have improved since UNHCR, WFP and their implementing partners began holding twice-weekly coordinating meetings in Addis Ababa.

To speed the delivery of food and avoid dangerous roads, WFP and UNHCR decided to mount an airbridge from Djibouti to Ethiopia.

By early September, an average of 14 flights a day carrying 214 metric tons of food was moving into Ethiopia, considerably easing the congestion at Djibouti port. But once on the ground, military escorts were required to move much of the food.

A Spanish government C-130 Hercules joined the airbridge in August and gave a massive boost to the food

airlift to the Ogaden. The aircraft also helped repatriate 2,750 Ethiopians, including many Oromo who field workers said would have been in grave danger had they traveled overland home to Dire Dawa.

Repatriation

The coming months should open up the prospect of "going home" to more than 1 million refugees and returnees in the Horn ... if UNHCR field workers and planners have their way.

Proposals from the field include projects to begin the voluntary repatriation of 430,000 of the 600,000 Somali refugees in Ethiopia and to ease the reintegration into their villages of the 357,000 Ethiopian returnees from Somalia.

Another 17,000 Ethiopians who sought sanctuary in Djibouti, Kenya and Sudan at the end of the civil war have already been repatriated and progress is being made in the program to repatriate another 68,000.

In addition, an operations plan is being prepared for the repatriation of 250,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan, where many have lived in exile for more than 25 years.

But repatriation is only the first step. The majority of returnees have nothing to return to and their former neighbors have little to share. Lack of sufficient food stocks to distribute even a one-month food package brought the returnee program to a virtual halt in the Ogaden. In the east and south, many former refugees are wandering back to reception points after finding a dearth of food in their villages.

UNHCR's most ambitious repatriation program will involve 250,000 of the Eritreans now in Sudan. Anxious to return home, about 10,000 have spontaneously repatriated but planners warn against complacency.

"These are the young, stronger males," said repatriation consultant Michel Barton. "There are many families headed by women and many elderly who will need help."

One scenario for the repatriation would involve 20 trucks, each transporting 25 people a day for 250 days a year, and would take two years to complete. Because of the massive devastation in Eritrea over some 30 years of war, Barton said field hospitals and water pumps would have to be installed before the operation could begin.

"This is not the end, it is the beginning of a larger peace. There is a solution in the Horn of Africa and people do want to go home," Barton said.

With northwestern Somalia basking in a separate peace, UNHCR helped raise the flag August 24 on the Hargeisa office it will share with UNDP, and began repatriation planning via its only contact with the outside world – one voice radio.

Field staff have proposed several repatriation projects aimed at the 430,000 Somalis from the northwest who are militantly anxious to return home from Ethiopia. But obstacles abound. Hargeisa is in ruins, its infrastructure destroyed by three years of war. And, more than 500,000 mines litter the ground around the city. The EEC and USAID are funding a project to train local personnel in mine destruction but it will be months before the area can be declared safe. UNHCR is providing tents and flights from Djibouti to the operation.

About 100,000 Somalis have already returned to the Hargeisa area and others are trickling in every day. Field officers report many returnees are leaving their ration cards with friends or family in the Ethiopian camps. Once they register as a returnee and obtain a new ration card, they are getting double rations. Headquarters and the field offices are pondering the problem.

As the security situation around Mogadishu deteriorated sharply in September, UNHCR shelved plans to repatriate Somalis from the south. Following reports of armed attacks on UN officials, efforts to reopen the Mogadishu office were suspended. By mid-September, the dire food shortages and civil conflict were forcing thousands of Somalis to seek sanctuary in Kenya, with most arriving at the already overcrowded Thika and Liboi camps.

Repatriation prospects are better for UNHCR's "Kassala caseload." But for too many of these young Ethiopian soldiers who sought sanctuary in Sudan, it is already too late.

In early June, 16,585 healthy Ethiopian soldiers and 5,700 of their dependents arrived at Kassala fleeing the forces of the new government. Three months later they were dying of malaria, dysentery and scurvy, "a disease caused by vitamin deficiencies and unknown in most of the world since the 17th century," according to one nutritionist.

For weeks, botched logistics and poor coordination between humanitarian agencies resulted in the delivery of rations consisting of little but wheat, much of it infested. Housed in a "closed camp," the soldiers had no access to fresh produce. By the time UNHCR learned of their plight, many of those who survived could barely walk.

REFUGEES AND RETURNEES IN THE HORN

Country of Asylum	Country of Origin	Number at 16/9/91
Ethiopia	Sudan	15,000
	Somalia	600,000
	Ethiopian returnees	371,000
Sudan	Ethiopia*	395,000
	Sudanese returnees	270,000
Kenya	Ethiopia	5,000
	Somalia	54,500
Djibouti	Ethiopia	15,000
	Somalia	80,000
Somalia	Ethiopia	50,000
	Somali returnees	100,000

* Includes only refugees benefiting from UNHCR assistance.

Word of the Kassala situation sent UNHCR field staffers into the markets where they used emergency funds to buy fresh fruit, vegetables and meat for the camp. Nutritionists and two doctors have been deployed to the site.

The "on again, off again" nature of the Kassala repatriation can be blamed in part for the nutrition crisis. With the agreement of the Addis Ababa government, some 3,623 former army officers and 127 of their dependents were flown from Kassala to the Ethiopian capital between July 29 and August 3 on 15 flights chartered by UNHCR. Insufficient food stocks were committed to the area because it had been assumed the rest of the group would be repatriated immediately.

The airlift, however, was abruptly halted while negotiations were concluded on a $156.2 million "demobilization package" that encompassed 250,000 former Ethiopian soldiers, including about 65,000 in Sudan and Djibouti. Under terms of the agreement, UNHCR will fund the cost of air travel, internal travel and maintenance in Sudan and Djibouti at a cost of $15.2 million. The package also will give the soldiers a 15-month supply of food as well as agricultural training so they can return to the land.

The saga of the 400,000 Sudanese who fled Ethiopia in the spring is equally tragic. About 270,000, including 13,000 unaccompanied minor boys as young as six years old, have been found around Nasir in southern Sudan. Their search for sanctuary led the majority into some of the most miserable conditions ever seen by UNHCR - some came under aerial bombardment, others were isolated, unsheltered, in swamps to starve.

Despite the herculean efforts of humanitarian agencies working with Operation Lifeline Sudan, the food situation in Nasir was critical for months. The plight of the returnees, particularly the unaccompanied minors, was described as "atrocious." Because of factional fighting in the region, every airlift from Kenya, every barge down the Nile must be negotiated painstakingly with the governments concerned and with parties in the conflict. And once permission to bring in food has been obtained it is often rescinded at the last moment. The resultant death rate has been enormous. The UNHCR team in Nasir has managed to bring in 50,000 blankets, 500 rolls of plastic sheeting and 10 Zodiac boats to aid the relief effort. But the situation remains precarious and it is vital that the food pipeline be kept open.

By mid-September, conditions around Nasir had stabilized somewhat and many of the returnees had made successful efforts to integrate into the local economy. The best news from the region was that many had managed to plant crops and were getting ready to reap their harvest.

The nutritional situation in nearly all refugee and returnee centers in the Horn of Africa has improved since High Commissioner Sadako Ogata pronounced herself "shocked and appalled" by the human misery she witnessed during a mid-summer inspection tour.

Mrs. Ogata visited three Ethiopian camps: Hartisheik, Kebri Bayeh and Itang. She found the nutritional status of children in the Kebri Bayeh camp particularly tragic - 46 percent had less than 80 percent of their normal body weight. Nutritionists called the figure "out of control" and doctors told the High Commissioner they did not need medicines to stem the equally "out of control" death rates - they just needed a balanced food basket.

The High Commissioner's visit and her discussions with other humanitarian organizations resulted in swift and decisive measures to correct logistical problems. An airlift of supplementary foods, dried skim milk in particular, was mounted. Monthly meetings of regional representatives were begun and cross-border travel by field officers was inaugurated so that the urgent needs of the refugee could be more logically addressed. Additional nutritionists, medical personnel, program managers and logistics experts were dispatched to the region.

SYLVANA FOA

High Commissioner Sadako Ogata asks Sudanese refugees in Itang about their problems and needs

WESTERN SAHARA

SOLUTION IN SIGHT

Despite last-minute fears that new fighting could force a delay, United Nations personnel began arriving in the Western Sahara in early September as part of an international effort to bring a lasting peace to the isolated region.

The UN mission, known as MINURSO, was approved by the UN Security Council in April and is responsible for organizing and conducting, in cooperation with the Organization of African Unity, a referendum on self-determination for the Western Sahara.

The referendum, scheduled for January, will determine whether the Britain-sized territory on the northwest coast of Africa gains independence or becomes a part of the Kingdom of Morocco. Both Morocco and the Frente Polisario, which has been waging a 16-year fight for an independent state in the Western Sahara, blamed each other for a new outbreak in hostilities in the days just prior to a September 6 ceasefire date set by the Security Council.

Despite the reported skirmishes, UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar ordered that the peace plan be fully implemented from the date of the ceasefire.

Obstacles

The resumption of hostilities in the weeks before the ceasefire placed great pressure on UN efforts to implement the peace plan on schedule. Both sides in the conflict denied allegations they were trying to torpedo the MINURSO process. With the implementation of the Sept. 6 ceasefire, it was still hoped that there would be enough time to organize the referendum for January as originally scheduled.

Adding to the pressure was the Moroccan request that an additional 120,000 names supplied by it be included in the roster of those eligible to vote in the referendum. Under the MINURSO plan, the voter identification process will use as a basis of its work the census conducted by Spanish authorities in 1974, a year before Spain gave up its claim to the territory. The Spanish census put at 73,500 the number of Western Saharans living inside the territory at that time. The Moroccan government

says its list of some 120,000 includes people who had been driven into exile before the 1974 Spanish census.

The MINURSO plan called for a review of the Spanish census and comments from all parties concerned. That review produced a revised list of 70,204 eligible voters. However, as of mid-September there was still no agreement on the criteria to be used in determining who, in addition to the revised list, is eligible to vote in the referendum.

Under the MINURSO plan, some 60 Western Saharan tribal chiefs, forming a "council of elders," will assist the MINURSO Identification Commission in identifying and registering those who are found to be eligible Western Saharan voters and whose names have been recorded on the finalized list as approved by the UN Secretary-General.

UN tasks

About 3,000 UN personnel, divided into military, civilian and security units, are taking part in the $180.6 million MINURSO operation.

The military component of 1,695 troops includes 550 military observers, an infantry battalion of 700 men, a 110-member air support group with four airplanes and eight helicopters, a 40-man military police unit, and support personnel.

Between 750 and 800 UN civil servants, including some 140 UNHCR people, will take part in the civilian component of the operation. The civilians will be divided among a Referendum Commission, an Identification Commission, and repatriation and administrative units.

A 300-member civil police unit will provide operational security.

The first task of MINURSO was to monitor the Sept. 6 ceasefire called for by the Secretary-General. The plan calls for a reduction of Moroccan troops to 65,000 men, and for the confinement of both the Moroccan army and the Frente Polisario to locations assigned by the UN. It also calls for the neutralization of the Moroccan paramilitary forces. The activities of both the Moroccan army and the Frente Polisario will be restricted and monitored by the United Nations.

The Moroccan civil administration in the Western Sahara will remain in place throughout the referendum process, along with the Moroccan police force and the estimated 150,000 current inhabitants of the territory. From the day of the ceasefire until the proclamation of the referendum results, the Secretary-General's special representative for the Western Sahara, Ambassador Johannes Manz, will have sole authority within the territory regarding all aspects of the organization and conduct of the referendum. He will be responsible for maintaining law and order throughout the transitional period, and is authorized to take any steps necessary to guarantee the security and freedom of movement of the population, as well as the impartiality of the referendum.

The next step will consist of the exchange of prisoners of war and the release of all political detainees.

Only then will the Identification Commission of MINURSO be able to complete the actual work of identifying all those Western Saharans eligible to vote in the referendum.

UNHCR's role

Within the overall UN plan, UNHCR will be responsible for the voluntary repatriation of those Western Saharans living outside the territory so they can participate in the referendum if they wish.

The UNHCR contingent will:
- make an assessment of the voluntary wish of Western Saharans to return;
- organize and carry out the repatriation;
- and establish and maintain reception centers in the territory until the referendum is held.

The majority of Western Saharans are located in Algeria, around the town of Tindouf, where many have been refugees since 1975. But others live in Mauritania and outside the region. Once they are identified as eligible, UNHCR can assist in their voluntary repatriation.

The actual number of eligible voters ultimately depends on the work of the Identification Commission, with whom UNHCR will be working very closely. Each eligible Western Saharan will receive an identification card which will allow him or her the right to vote in the referendum. UNHCR staff will then ask those eligible whether they do in fact want to voluntarily repatriate, and to which UN-established reception center they would prefer to go. UNHCR's part of the operation is expected to cost approximately $34.5 million, paid for by voluntary contributions. This is in addition to the MINURSO budget, which has been financed through assessed contributions.

The expected departure point for most of those wishing to repatriate will be Tindouf.

The second phase of UNHCR's involvement will be the actual repatriation of refugees, which should begin around November 19 and be completed in early January. For logistical and security reasons, it was decided that a massive airlift would be the best solution for getting the refugees back to the Western Sahara.

Occurring simultaneously with the first and second phases will be the construction of reception centers in the territory to temporarily accommodate the returnees. The centers are expected to be in use for about 10 weeks – six for the actual repatriation, followed by a three-week referendum campaign, and then a week for the actual conduct of the referendum.

A reduced number of UNHCR staff will remain in the territory for some time after the referendum to fulfill its monitoring role for returnees in accordance with its internationally accepted responsibilities.

MINURSO's Referendum Commission will organize and conduct the referendum and proclaim the result. The balloting is expected to begin three weeks after the completion of the repatriation exercise. MINURSO will ensure that the referendum is free and fair, without military or administrative constraints.

The referendum itself will be preceded by a short political campaign which will begin only when the special representative estimates that the conditions exist for a free and fair referendum.

Polling stations will be set up throughout the territory. The referendum will be decided by a simple majority. The results will be announced within days of the actual vote.

Once the results are confirmed, the MINURSO military unit will monitor the withdrawal of one or the other of the parties.

SYLVIE GIRARD

PERSIAN GULF EXODUS STRETCHED RESOURCES

PERSIAN GULF

Office lights burned late into the night, and weekends became just two more regular working days. Beepers and portable phones rang at all hours in staff homes all over town, and the duty officer spent nights on a cot in the office. A special operations room was hurriedly set up and soon became filled with maps, urgent messages, flight schedules, supply requests and funding updates.

The Persian Gulf crisis turned UNHCR's Geneva headquarters into a non-stop hive of activity for days on end. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi troops, in addition to its military, political and economic consequences, sparked an exodus of more than 3 million people.

As tensions grew in the days before the actual outbreak of the war, UNHCR officials urged governments

in the region to reaffirm the principle of asylum. Preparedness measures were launched. At the beginning of January 1991, UNHCR helped prepare a Regional Humanitarian Plan of Action in a bid to anticipate the numbers and needs of those who would be displaced should war erupt. With each passing day, that possibility looked ever more likely. UNHCR, other UN agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) were charged with executing the plan.

Even before the war began in mid-January, more than 700,000 people had fled Iraq and Kuwait. Over the next two months, another 65,000 people, mostly foreign workers, sought refuge in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Syria and Turkey. Most were repatriated to their homelands. UNHCR assisted several thousand refugees and asylum-seekers for whom immediate repatriation was not possible.

With the end of the war, a third wave of refugees was generated when the Iraqi government moved to reassert its authority over the north, the northeast, and the south of the country.

In two weeks at the beginning of April, the Iraqi refugee population in Iran skyrocketed from 50,000 to 560,000. High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata called it "the fastest refugee movement in the 40-year history of UNHCR." A quarter of a million other refugees gathered on the Iraq-Turkey border.

On April 9 the situation had become a refugee emergency. UNHCR was asked to "undertake full operational responsibility" and become the lead agency during the crisis. The Regional Humanitarian Plan of Action had to be revised. The original plan had anticipated 400,000 displaced people. By mid-May, some 1.4 million Iraqi refugees had fled to Iran, and approximately 500,000 others were in Turkey or at the Iraq-Turkey border, for a total of 1.9 million.

Emergency assistance

High Commissioner Ogata visited the refugee sites in Iran and Turkey immediately after the beginning of the Kurdish exodus. Providing assistance to so many refugees in such inhospitable terrain and under extremely difficult weather conditions presented "an immense logistical problem," Mrs. Ogata said. Along the Turkish border, for example, refugees were scattered across a dozen isolated mountain sites. Providing them with food and water was a logistical nightmare. Only two of those sites were accessible by tractor. Supplies to the other locations had to be brought in by helicopter. Initially, the infant mortality rate was tragically high, and many refugees were maimed by mines as they crossed the border.

Additional UN emergency staff was rapidly deployed to the region. Coalition forces mounted an airlift of life-saving medical supplies and food and provided a security zone near the Iraqi-Turkish border designed to encourage refugees back into Iraq where they could be fed and sheltered. Transit centers were established on a plain to the east of Zakho. In May, the population of these centers reached 60,000.

By the beginning of June, UNHCR had 334 local and international staff in Iraq, Iran and Turkey. Funded by donors, UNHCR arranged more than 250 flights carrying some 8,000 metric tons of relief supplies for the refugees. This did not include supplies provided by other UN agencies, bilateral donors, NGOs, intergovernmental organizations like the European Community, and the coalition forces. Additional UNHCR supplies were brought in by sea, and then overland.

Current challenges

If the refugees left Iraq fast, they also returned very quickly. They started to trek home within six weeks of the beginning of the exodus. By the second week of June, close to 1 million refugees had returned to Iraq, but only about half of them went to their previous homes.

General living conditions in Iraq are still hard. Unemployment is rampant, food prices are high, and much of the infrastructure was damaged during the war. Lack of sanitation and potable water are major problems in some areas.

UNHCR, while protecting and assisting returnees, has stressed the importance of rebuilding the infrastructure and supply networks.

Security and population movements are major concerns of the returnee program in Iraq. By the beginning of September no formal agreement had yet been signed between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish parties. Until such an agreement is concluded, the situation will remain tense and sporadic violence may occur at any time.

This level of tension has a direct impact on the movement of people. While returnees continue to come back from Iran and Turkey, secondary movements also take place within the Kurdish areas. These movements are from areas not controlled by the Iraqi government to those that are, or to areas under de facto joint control of the government and the Peshmerga.

In addition to assisting returnees and displaced people, UNHCR is performing its traditional protection role through its large presence in Kurdish areas. All parties, including local government officials, recognize that UNHCR, other UN agencies, and the UN guards on duty in the region have a stabilizing effect.

UNHCR has 11 offices in the country with 130 international staff, including 80 seconded through the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils and Swedish Rädda Barnen. UNHCR's mission covers an area of more than 100,000 square kilometers. Seventy-nine all-terrain vehicles, some of them on loan to NGOs with programs in the country, provide transport.

A network of 34 warehouses in 13 different locations has been set up to store UNHCR emergency and relief supplies. Special arrangements were made for the transport and distribution of medical supplies.

Emergency water tanks were erected in areas where large numbers of returnees had gathered. The tanks are kept topped up by a fleet of 25 tanker trucks. For the longer term, complete water systems, including generators, pumps and pipes, are being installed in at least 50 villages and towns where the returnees are expected to eventually settle. Latrines and garbage collection systems are also being set up.

While its work in northeastern Iraq along the Iranian border is still enormous, the programs in the north, near Turkey, are expected to be gradually reduced. The Zakho transit center, for example, was closed at the beginning of September, its warehouses emptied and its supplies sent to Dohuk or the northeast. Staffing levels were to be reviewed in October.

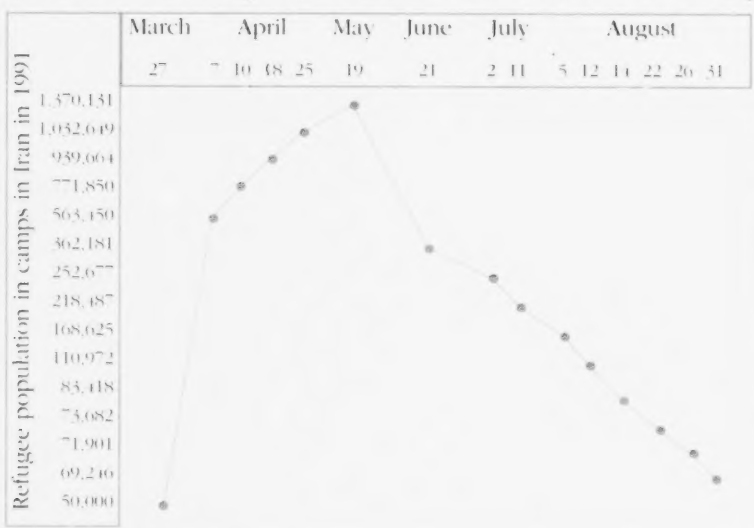
Many NGOs helped with the refugee program along the Turkish border, and UNHCR is encouraging their involvement in the northeast as well. CARE, *Médecins sans Frontières*, Oxfam, Save the Children-UK, Danchurchaid and the Danish Refugee Council have all agreed to expand their operations supporting UNHCR's programs in health, water, shelter, sanitation, transport and logistics.

By the end of August, some 640,000 people were still displaced in northeastern areas. UNHCR hopes many of these people will voluntarily go back to their original homes, but only about half are expected to do so. Before agreeing to return, they must be assured that food, water, and health and sanitation services have been restored and, most important, that they will be secure once they leave the mountains.

A substantial number of displaced and returnees from Turkey and Iran are staying in several destroyed towns - Halabja, Said Sadiq, Penjwin - and arrangements must be made to shelter them before the harsh winter sets in.

UNHCR has prepared a winterization program that will provide cash grants as well as building materials. It is strictly an emergency

The fastest refugee movement in UNHCR history



UNHCR/M. Watado

measure aimed at getting people through the freezing months.

The standard shelter, constructed by the returnees themselves, is 21 square meters in size.The walls are built of stone and mud. The roof consists of timber, corrugated iron sheets and mud. Procurement of building materials began in September and actual work was to begin by early October. NGOs will assist UNHCR in the project,which will cover the shelter needs of 62,000 families in three administrative areas: Sulaimaniah, Erbil and Dohuk. An emergency back-up stock of winter tents and 400 metric tons of food were stored in-country and abroad.

Elsewhere

Following is a brief look at developments elsewhere in the region.

TURKEY – By early September, some 5,000 of the nearly half a million refugees who flocked to the Turkish border remained in the Haj camp at Silopi. About 100 a day returned to Iraq during the month of August. UNHCR is maintaining a presence in Diyarbakir and Silopi to ensure international protection and assistance for the refugees as well as to support operations in northern Iraq.

Prior to the onset of the fall rains in November, UNHCR in cooperation with an NGO will finish cleaning up the former Cukurca camp to prevent pollution of the Turkish watershed in Hakkari province.

IRAN - Of the 1.4 million Kurdish and Shiite people who sought refuge in Iran, only 69,246 remained in camps at the end of August, primarily in five provinces. Another 50,000 were living with relatives and friends. UNHCR's priority for those in the north - West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Bakhtaran provinces - is to provide appropriate winter shelter. Temperatures in the region can plunge to minus 25 degrees centigrade in the winter.

The first of some 3,300 winterized shelters capable of housing up to 40,000 people will be completed by early November. Plans have been made for the construction of additional shelters if necessary. The easily transportable, prefabricated houses can be assembled by four people in an hour. No foundation is required. The houses were developed by UNHCR's Program and Technical Support Section using knowledge gained from a similar winter operation in Iran in 1988.

SYRIA & JORDAN – In addition to Iran and Turkey, the situation in Iraq has had serious consequences in countries such as Jordan and Syria, which are still giving refuge to several thousand Iraqis. During the first two refugee movements from Kuwait and Iraq, Jordan hosted more evacuees than any other country. Since August, it has faced another influx of Palestinians and Jordanians who had been residents of Kuwait.

The Jordanian press reported that the new influx has caused tension in the kingdom, including inflated housing costs and fears of water shortages. Jordan's secretary of the interior, in a meeting with UN agencies and NGOs, appealed for international assistance to help in the settlement of these returnees. Thousands of Iraqis have been arriving legally in Jordan and many do not wish to return home. They have approached UNHCR as well as embassies in Amman seeking resettlement.

Speaking to Western ambassadors in Amman on 14 August, King Hussein said: "Jordan, which now finds itself receiving the third wave of refugees and displaced deported people, expects from the civilized world a more humanitarian approach and attitude towards the refugees." He also appealed to the Jordanian public to help the more than 300,000 Jordanians - almost one-tenth of the entire population - who have already returned in the wake of the Persian Gulf War.

KUWAIT – At the end of the Gulf War, Kuwait began a massive reconstruction program. Security became a priority concern of the government. Iraqis, Bidoons (stateless people) and Palestinians, most of them holding Jordanian passports, have been forced to leave the country. This complex and delicate situation calls for UNHCR to exercise its traditional protection and assistance roles. High-level UNHCR missions have been in Kuwait, and UNHCR now has a regular presence in the country to deal with this sensitive problem in coordination with the authorities and other humanitarian organizations.

SAUDI ARABIA – About 23,000 Iraqi refugees are in the Rafha camp. Some of them sought asylum directly in Saudia Arabia. Most of them, however, were resettled there from Salman and Salwan, in the demilitarized zone, during the occupation of that area by coalition forces. There is also another group of 13,000 Iraqi prisoners of war who refused to be repatriated to Iraq and who could be considered of concern to UNHCR.

MANOEL DE ALMEIDA E SILVA

for UNHCR to be interested beyond band-aid responses to root causes which may spark refugee movements. It is imperative for UNHCR to insist on attacking root causes through the encouragement of democracy and development.

Suggested changes, such as the Ford Foundation's UN reform proposals and the 1991 ECOSOC deliberation, must be listened to. But some of their apparent patchwork solutions, like the appointment of a standing Office to Coordinate Humanitarian Affairs, might merely lead to more disappointment. With the end of the Cold War, a bold, holistic tackling of mandates and dysfunctions is in order. And who can now deny the need for activist leadership at the top of the United Nations to drive the reform agenda.

What is needed now is a prophet inside the UN system, working with prophets in a few concerned member states and private agencies outside, to consult and decide on a comprehensive plan of action to bring about a New Humanitarian Architecture. The prophetic mantle inside the system may well need to rest on the High Commissioner for Refugees.

And not just by default. Not just because most of the other UN barons see their self-interest resting in inaction and preservation of the status quo.

The High Commissioner's interest (though not necessarily the mandate) spans the continuum of need mentioned above. The acronym "UNICEF" automatically evokes the image of children in the world's consciousness. The acronym "UNHCR" must be seen to evoke human rights; root causes; early warning; preparedness; and pre-emption through political liberalization and development.

Don't look to changing your mandate, Madame High Commissioner. To do so would only weaken it. And in any event, you don't need a changed mandate to legitimize advocacy of actions which touch your mandate. In your short time in office, you have already demonstrated that the prophetic mantle fits you rather well. Use it in the bold and prophetic way that these times call for. Use it to help make flesh and blood dictate the architecture that is now missing in the New World Order.

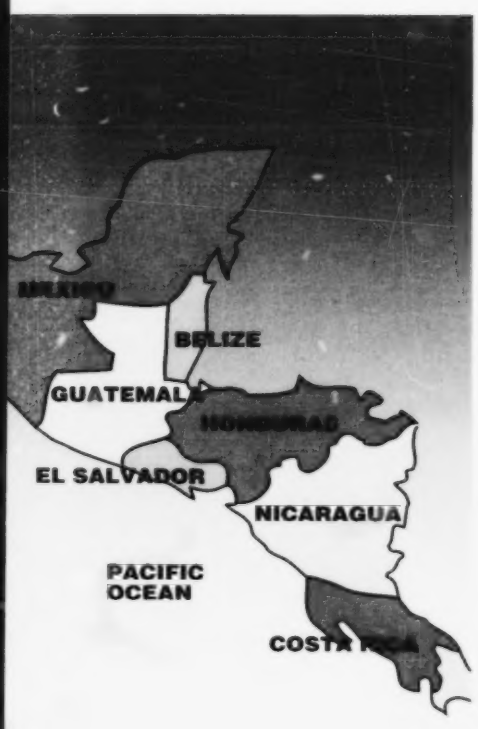
And if you do, UNHCR and refugees will benefit the most.

ARTHUR E. DEWEY
Former Deputy
High Commissioner
for Refugees

We know what happened,and is happening in Liberia. Most would like to forget it. Those who are reminded tend to excuse it by saying that the UN barons can never be expected to act logically or subject themselves to central direction.

CIREFCA: AT THE CROSSROADS

CENTRAL AMERICA



Central America is finally beginning to leave its troubled past behind, thanks to the regional peace process. The number of returnees outweighs UNHCR-assisted refugees by a ratio of 3 to 2. The return home of nearly 78,000 Salvadorian and Nicaraguan refugees since January 1990 underscores the scope of progress.

A much improved international climate and negotiations to end civil conflict have brought major changes to the region. In El Salvador, Guatemala and particularly Nicaragua – the three main refugee producing countries – these positive trends are clear.

In Nicaragua, elections brought a burning conflict to an end in March 1990. Negotiations to end El Salvador's 11-year conflict have now reached a critical point, with the establishment of the United Nations Observer Mission (ONUSAL). In Guatemala, peace talks have begun. But the peace talks coexist with an on-going armed struggle and reports of human rights violations are still routine.

Political uncertainties are compounded by socio-economic woes as Central America struggles to emerge from the 1980s – often called the "lost decade" in development terms.

In the seven CIREFCA countries, success has varied because of uneven progress in the peace process, which has in turn influenced donor support.

The First International Meeting in New York in June 1990 yielded $75 million, nearly half of the $161 million required. Contributions to UNHCR's CIREFCA projects totaled $19.8 million for 1990 and 1991.

Tiny BELIZE has experienced a steady influx of refugees, mainly from Guatemala and El Salvador, since the early 1980s. Aliens now account for 14 percent of its 200,000 population. Local resentment against foreigners is running high.

But the Belizean government is committed to CIREFCA as a means of integrating refugees in the local population. Alone amongst asylum countries in the region, Belize has incorporated refugees into its National Development Plan.

In COSTA RICA, all six camps that once housed 30,000 refugees have closed. The government's CIREFCA strategy gives

refugees two choices: voluntary repatriation or local integration. Since early 1990, 15,000 Nicaraguan refugees have voluntarily repatriated and the other 15,000 have opted for local integration.

The future of CIREFCA in EL SALVADOR will be determined by the outcome of the peace negotiations. Almost 80 percent of the Salvadorians who have gone back home are former inhabitants of the stifling "closed camps" in Honduras. If the peace talks are successful, thousands of Salvadorians, who lead a clandestine and marginal existence abroad, could decide to return home and international assistance would be vital. Preparing for a cease-fire, the government, with UNDP assistance, has drawn up a National Plan for Reconstruction.

In GUATEMALA, the issue of populations driven from their homes by the tragic conflict is on the agenda of the peace negotiations. Direct talks have begun between the government and representatives of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico. Responding to assistance needs of displaced populations, the government, with UNDP support, has established the *Fondo para la Paz*, with an initial contribution of $7 million.

Despite fears for their safety, a growing number of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico are beginning to show an interest in going home. A determining factor in their decision will be the presence of UNHCR, both in the negotiations with the authorities, and in monitoring the physical security and protection situation in returnee areas.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is HONDURAS, perhaps the most visible example of CIREFCA's success. Once at the heart of the regional conflict, with over 40,000 refugees from Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, Honduras has seen its refugee population drop by 95 percent, through voluntary repatriation, since 1989. Now only 2,000 Salvadorians are left in Mesa Grande camp, the last of the "closed camps" once synonymous with the fate of many Salvadorian refugees.

Through CIREFCA, Honduras is hoping to repair the damage done to the country's social services and natural resources by the presence of tens of thousands of refugees for more than a decade.

In MEXICO, CIREFCA has mainly benefited Guatemalan refugees in the South. The $13.5 million local settlement project for 18,000 Guatemalan refugees in Campeche and Quintana Roo will be handed over to the Mexican government by the end of 1992.

In Chiapas, extreme poverty and a lack of land for the 25,000 Guatemalan refugees led the Mexican government to establish "safe-settlements" aimed at creating minimal conditions for self-sufficiency. UNHCR supports this effort while simultaneously promoting voluntary repatriation.

Nowhere has the CIREFCA goal of linking humanitarian relief with development faced a greater test than in NICARAGUA. Since early 1990, over 66,000 Nicaraguans have gone home, most from Honduras and Costa Rica. Nicaragua, after a decade of civil war and in dire economic straits, was ill-equipped to cope with this mass return.

> ■ *As the Secretary-General said : "CIREFCA is not an end in itself but merely a milestone along the way to development, stability and peace in Central America."*

Emergency assistance provided to returnees soon proved totally inadequate to meet basic survival needs. In addition, returnees created a heavy burden on their own impoverished communities and tensions erupted over land.

To prevent a reverse flow of refugees from Nicaragua, immediate action had to be taken. The response needed to be directed at the communities and could not await funding and technical revision of CIREFCA projects which had a broader regional development focus.

The "Quick Impact Project" was thus developed, conceived as a "bridge" between short-term relief and development, and designed by UNHCR, UNDP and the government. Sixty micro-projects, based on priorities chosen by the communities themselves, are aimed at stimulating economic recovery while addressing critical needs.

Since the "QIPs" began, over 50 percent of the 1991 micro-projects have been completed.

Vital to the "QIP" success has been a feeling of community "ownership" of the project. Community labor has often been responsible for rapid execution and low costs. Completed projects are handed over to local officials, who then assume responsibility for them.

In 1989, the number of uprooted Central Americans was estimated at over 2 million, one-third of them internally displaced. The uniqueness of CIREFCA has been its integrated approach to solutions rooted in development for refugees, returnees and displaced persons.

Yet to date, most of the beneficiaries of CIREFCA have been refugees and returnees. In fact, the internally displaced have been the "hidden half" of the CIREFCA process.

Although not legally competent, UNHCR cannot remain indifferent to the plight of these people. Returnees and internally displaced are linked by shared problems, over land and security for example. For CIREFCA to be successful, it must be seen to emphasize development, legal rights and protection of uprooted Central Americans in accordance with the basic principles of the CIREFCA Plan of Action.

Lessons should be drawn from projects which work and projects which do not. It is essential that the NGOs be heeded, for they are the ones on the ground, working amongst these populations. "Quick Impact" is an example of a new response to the special needs of the "poorest of the poor" - only too often overlooked by central planners dealing with large-scale development projects.

In March 1992, the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee will hold its Second International Meeting in El Salvador and will consider an extension of CIREFCA's three-year, time frame.

As the UN Secretary-General said at the May 1989 Conference: "CIREFCA is not an end in itself but merely a milestone along the way to development, stability and peace in Central America."

JENIFER OTSEA

OPERATIONS

NO PLACE TO GO BUT HOME

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Tens of thousands of Indo-Chinese who have failed to qualify as refugees are languishing in crowded camps throughout Asia.

Rejected for resettlement abroad, these would-be refugees have no place left to go but home. But they refuse, choosing instead to spend years in the camps in the slim hope that somehow international policies will change.

They include 63,000 Lao in Thailand and an estimated 100,000 Vietnamese in a number of camps from Indonesia to Japan.

Their presence has strained the patience and resources of governments in the region — most notably in Hong Kong — and threatens to erode the fragile commitment to the traditions of first asylum by those governments.

UNHCR/J. Hollmann

In Hong Kong, where some 62,000 Vietnamese boat people are jammed into crowded camps and detention centers, public sentiment against first asylum is running high. Residents of the British colony voted for their first democratically elected Legislative Council in September, and some analysts predicted the new council would move to end first asylum.

Clinton Leeks, the Hong Kong government's refugee coordinator, said recently that the colony's camps are "seriously overcrowded and the situation is likely to get worse."

"If it does," Leeks warned, "we will reach a situation where we can no longer maintain the principle of first asylum..."

Some analysts fear this continuing flood of economic migrants from Viet Nam may also undermine the progress that has been made under the 12-year-old Orderly Departure Program (ODP), and by the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), approved by 76 countries in 1989.

The numbers

In contrast to a dramatic decline in arrivals elsewhere in Asia, the number of boat people, mainly from central Viet Nam, flooding into Hong Kong so far this year is nearly four times that of a year ago. By the end of July, 14,700 Vietnamese had sailed into the colony in 1991, up from 3,700 for the same period a year ago.

Of the 61,000 boat people in Hong Kong as of August 1, approximately 18,100 had been denied refugee status, 37,700 were awaiting screening or were appealing their status, and 5,700 had been "screened in" as refugees eligible for resettlement in a third country. If previous trends hold, only a small percentage of the 37,700 still awaiting screening will be given refugee status, bringing the total number of boat people in Hong Kong with no possibility of resettlement to close to 50,000.

"Hong Kong is on the front line, it is bearing all the burden," said Alexander Casella, UNHCR's special adviser for East and Southeast Asia. "It needs far more sympathy than it is getting."

Casella noted, however, that the decline in arrivals of boat people elsewhere in Asia may offer hope for Hong Kong as well.

In Thailand, a traditional destination for boat people from southern Viet Nam, arrivals dropped sharply during the latest sailing season — from September 1990 to June 1991. UNHCR figures show that only nine boats with a total of 221 passengers arrived in southern Thailand during the most recent season, compared to 118 boats and 3,270 people during the same period last year.

And for all of South-East Asia, excluding Hong Kong, only 768 boat people arrived in the first half of this year, while four times that number voluntarily repatriated. Pressure on these other countries to end first asylum has thus eased, Casella said. "It is quite clear that pressure on governments to take drastic or unilateral measures has considerably diminished," he said.

The decline in clandestine departures from southern Viet Nam can be attributed to several factors, including:

— The success of the Orderly Departure Program in systematically resettling eligible Vietnamese.

— Improving socio-economic conditions in Viet Nam.

— And widespread publicity within southern Viet Nam encouraging the use of the Orderly Departure Program and emphasizing the stringent requirements that must be met by all those seeking resettlement abroad.

The obstacles

With the drop in departures from southern and northern Viet Nam, UNHCR, the Vietnamese government and others are now turning their attention toward curbing the clandestine flow of boat people from the central part of the country to Hong Kong.

The continuing exodus from central Viet Nam can be attributed in large part to the depressed economy of the region, between Hue and Nha Trang, exacerbated by the Soviet Union's halt in aid, and to the difficulties involved in mounting a large-scale media information campaign in isolated areas.

Rumors have also contributed to the exodus. For example, thousands of boat people arrived in Hong Kong earlier this year after hearing sketchy reports that an American congressman had suggested that Vietnamese be given jobs rebuilding war-ravaged Kuwait.

Whatever the reasons for the influx, Hong Kong has been left in a very difficult position.

"We are bursting at the seams," said Hong Kong government spokesman Paul Brown. "Ninety-five percent of all Vietnamese boat people now arrive here."

Brown believes efforts by UNHCR, the Vietnamese government and others to stem the flow of clandestine departures at their source must be augmented by massive international economic aid to Viet Nam.

But he says one of the biggest obstacles to such aid is a 16-year-old U.S. economic embargo against Viet Nam that has effectively blocked assistance from international lending institutions as well as private American investment. Without funds from multilateral lending institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Viet Nam has found it all but impossible to begin the infrastructure work necessary to rebuild its economy.

"The fastest way (to begin reducing the number of boat people) would be for the Americans to lift their sanctions," Brown said.

His sentiments were echoed by six representatives of American, Canadian and Australian non-governmental humanitarian organizations who visited Viet Nam in May.

"At the heart of the human tragedy that has seen thousands of Vietnamese leave on unsafe boats in search of a better future is the combination of social, economic, and political conditions in Viet Nam," the delegates said in a recent report on their trip.

"It is deeply regrettable that Viet Nam's participation in the global economy continues to be hampered because of difficulties in its bilateral relationship with the United States of America," the report continued. "Viet Nam needs and wants development assistance."

Delegation member Dale de Haan, a former UNHCR deputy high commissioner, said it was imperative that the international community assist in Viet Nam's development.

"Viet Nam ought to be brought into the international system," said de Haan, now executive director of Church World Service's immigration and refugee program.

While acknowledging that economic factors are part of the problem, U.S. officials say there is no proof that ending the embargo will stem the exodus of boat people.

"Economic problems are clearly a factor in the flight," said refugee specialist Allan Jury of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in Geneva. "But it is a tenuous link to suggest that economic relations would change the outflow."

Jury noted that the screening process for asylum-seekers administered by the Hong Kong government under the Comprehensive Plan of Action has shown that approximately 20 percent of the boat people are genuine refugees.

"When their odds are one in five that they are going to be resettled, it is unrealistic to expect the flow to disappear," Jury said.

The solutions

Under the CPA, all Vietnamese and Lao who flee their countries undergo a screening procedure to determine whether they meet the internationally accepted definition of a refugee.

Those who do are resettled. Those who do not currently have two choices — to return to their home country under UNHCR protection, or to remain warehoused in the crowded and sometimes violent camps. Those who are denied refugee status cannot, for the moment, be forced home against their will.

But more than 13,000 people have volunteered to return to Viet

Nam under the CPA and an agreement between UNHCR and the Vietnamese government guaranteeing that they will not be punished for leaving.

UNHCR monitors the returnees' reintegration into Vietnamese society and provides a monthly stipend of $30 per person during their first year at home, paid through the Hanoi government.

Unfortunately, payment of this important monetary incentive occasionally has been erratic, with some returnees receiving nothing for several months. The recent NGO delegation blamed the delays on tardiness by donor governments in fulfilling their pledges, and noted that the entire program could be put at risk if the problem is not solved. UNHCR says that measures have been taken to redress this problem.

However, a new glitch has recently arisen in connection with the monthly stipend payments – the so-called "excursion syndrome." With the decline in clandestine departures from Viet Nam, those organizing the boat trips have drastically reduced prices. Where boat people once paid thousands of dollars to leave, they now can make the trip to Hong Kong for less than $100. This means they can travel to the Hong Kong camps, get free food and medical care, purchase some sought after consumer goods and then apply for voluntary repatriation back to Vietnam. By volunteering to return immediately, they receive $50 cash before boarding the departure flight from Hong Kong. They are then flown back to Viet Nam, where they receive the $360 per-person repatriation allowance, which is more than two years' salary for a civil servant.

About 1,000 boat people voluntarily repatriated in August, most of them after only short stays in Hong Kong. Some of the returnees urged officials to speed up their departure for home so they would not miss the opening of the new school year in Viet Nam.

UNHCR and its CPA partners are looking at ways to end these abuses.

The reintegration assistance provided by UNHCR will soon be supplemented by a $13 million program funded by the European Community, said UNHCR's Viet Nam desk officer, Anne-Willem Bijleveld.

"The EC assistance will target aid equally to both returnees and the surrounding population to help deter others from leaving," said Bijleveld.

UNHCR, the Vietnamese government and others are also stepping up their media and information campaign in central Viet Nam.

UNHCR special adviser Casella says an earlier publicity campaign to curb clandestine departures from central Viet Nam did not reach as many people as it should have.

"The people of central Viet Nam are not getting the word," Casella said.

Hong Kong's Brown agreed. "Viet Nam is a big country," he said. "It is obvious that the programs haven't reached everybody."

In a bid to strengthen the information campaign, Vietnamese government officials, journalists and UNHCR representatives are scheduled to meet in late October in the coastal city of Danang.

While discouraging clandestine departures, the media campaign will continue to encourage eligible Vietnamese to take advantage of the Orderly Departure Program, negotiated by UNHCR and Viet Nam in 1979.

Last year, some 60,000 Vietnamese left under the Orderly Departure Program, and another 100,000 are expected to leave in 1991.

Under the ODP, applicants are screened by representatives from prospective resettlement countries before leaving Viet Nam. Those accepted are flown from Viet Nam to their new homes.

In all, more than 250,000 people have been resettled in other countries — primarily Australia, Canada, France and the United States — under the Orderly Departure Program.

The Comprehensive Plan of Action also covers more than 63,000 Lao people living outside their country. This part of the plan received an important boost in June when UNHCR and the Lao and Thai governments agreed to a new repatriation plan. A similar agreement was concluded by UNHCR and the Lao and Chinese governments to promote the return of 4,000 Lao living in southern China.

The $3 million plan includes a pilot information program that will target some 6,000 Lao in Thailand and encourage them to return home. Officials hope their movement will then spur other Lao to end their long exile.

The new program also will finance land preparation and the construction of new settlements in Laos. Lao exile leaders will be taken into Laos to observe the new conditions in their homeland so they can report back to their people still in the Thai camps.

The Lao government has agreed to permit UNHCR and Thai officials to visit resettlement sites to monitor the return, and Thailand has reaffirmed that the repatriation will be entirely voluntary.

All of this recent activity under the Comprehensive Plan of Action has strengthened hope that a satisfactory solution to this tragic problem is finally within reach.

PETER KESSLER

CAMBODIA

THE LONG ROAD HOME

The prospect of an end to 12 years of war in Cambodia has prompted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to begin preparations for the return home of more than 350,000 Cambodians living in camps in Thailand.

"We think all the objective factors exist now for (starting) physical preparations for repatriation," said Darioush Bayandor, UNHCR's coordinator for the Cambodian repatriation.

Bayandor's August announcement reflected the progress made in peace talks between Cambodia's four warring factions and new hopes that the bloody conflict, which began in 1978 when Viet Nam overthrew the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, is finally coming to an end.

UNHCR Asia Bureau Director Jamshid Anvar said developments in Cambodia were a reflection of greater global changes. "In the same way that the end of the Cold War set in motion the changes in Eastern Europe, it is assisting in bringing changes in Cambodia," Anvar said.

But the road home may still be a long and dangerous one for the more than 350,000 Cambodians living in a half-dozen camps in eastern Thailand. "We are up against a tremendous task," said Bayandor, who described the planned repatriation as "a highly complex operation" costing an estimated $109 million.

UNHCR has already begun the process of selecting settlement sites. But Bayandor says that finding 100,000 to 150,000 hectares of suitable agricultural land that is free of mines and close to existing villages is the "biggest challenge" facing UNHCR. Assisting in this task is the French SPOT satellite, which has provided UNHCR with 70 land-use maps. The computer-enhanced images will help identify farmland, making on-location surveys by technical experts and mine-clearing teams much easier.

"Mine clearance will be the biggest hurdle," said UNHCR Cambodia desk officer Patrick de Sousa. "We know mines are a problem because so many people have been blown-up." The International Rescue Committee is conducting mine awareness programs in the border camps under the direction of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General. UNHCR will continue to support the program until the Cambodians return home. The actual job of mine clearance will be left to the UN military forces.

Many of the Cambodians have spent most of their lives outside their homeland, and returning to a country they barely know presents huge difficulties. Interviews with Cambodians indicate that many people have no "peasant memory," and have lost their agricultural survival-skills during years of camp con-

finement. "More than 40 percent are people below the age of 15," said Anvar. "Most do not know their country, and have never seen a rice paddy."

Then there is the problem of the returnees' readjustment. People who have grown used to chlorinated water, regular food distribution, semi-urbanized surroundings and periodic medical care will suddenly find themselves back in a country that in many respects has been bypassed by the 20th century.

If all goes as planned, the repatriation could get under way in early 1992. By then, the Cambodians in Thailand will already have indicated where they want to be settled. They will then go under UNHCR's wing in staging areas adjacent to their UN Border Relief Organization-assisted camps. There they will confirm their choice of a final destination before boarding buses that will take them home.

From the staging areas the returnees will be moved overland to six UNHCR reception centers inside Cambodia, where they will be sheltered and fed for a few days while they await a final bus ride home. Just transporting them will be a major task, using buses and trucks rented in Thailand that will carry the returnees to the reception centers. Key bridges and roads will have to be inspected and readied to handle the heavy traffic.

UNHCR expects to move about 10,000 Cambodians a week and to finish the operation in six months. But UNHCR emphasizes that it will not begin the operation until it is certain that it can move the returnees in complete safety.

In addition to upgrading the transport network, the operation will involve the rental and purchase of dozens of vehicles and the purchase of tons of provisions for the returnees while they are in transit. Food warehouses are already under construction to store incoming supplies. An advanced radio communications system will also be installed so that UNHCR field officers can stay in constant contact with returnees' convoys.

The price of the operation is money well spent, says UNHCR's de Sousa. "Would donor countries prefer to spend money to feed each person for 20 years in camps, or would they want to send them home?" he asked.

Crucial to the returnees will be their assistance package — a welcome-home gift from UNHCR to ease their return. Everyone will receive food, household items, and agricultural and shelter materials. UNHCR and its partners like the World Food Program believe the returnees will need one or two harvests to build up their food stocks, with some people requiring up to 18 months before they will no longer rely on international aid.

Currently only $9 million, mostly from the Japanese government, is available to fund the first stages of the repatriation. While an important start, the sum represents less than a tenth of the total funding needed. UNHCR officials fear that if the repatriation is held up, thousands of Cambodians will begin crossing the frontier on their own. "If money does not arrive UNHCR may find itself facing a spontaneous mass influx for which it is not prepared," said Bayandor.

An unsupervised return could result in tragedy as people cross minefields or run short of food. UNHCR is prepared to respond with a cross-border food supply program and has laid the groundwork for mobilizing medical teams. But with international support, this nightmarish scenario can be avoided, and the long road home made a peaceful one for a people who have been away for far too long.

PETER KESSLER

UNHCR/T. Mosnier

Thousands of Cambodians have lost limbs to mines.

UNHCR/B. Gardner

END OF EXILE BRINGS NEW FEARS

Bokwe Mafuna's bags are nearly packed and ready to go, but the South African refugee still worries about what awaits him when he finally gets home.

After 18 years in exile - three in Botswana and the rest in France - Mafuna was delighted when he heard that UNHCR and the South African government had concluded a landmark agreement on the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 40,000 refugees and political exiles around the world. Some have been away from South Africa for more than 30 years.

The agreement was formally signed on 4 September by High Commissioner Sadako Ogata and A. Leslie Manley, Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa to the United Nations in Geneva.

"This agreement means that South Africa has crossed a political threshold," Ambassador Manley said at the signing ceremony. "I believe that we are entering into the mainstream of international affairs."

The agreement formally establishes the first United Nations presence in South Africa, which is currently engaged in sweeping social and political reform.

Mrs. Ogata described the signing of the formal Memorandum of Understanding as a "very historic event. It is the outcome of great efforts and the beginning of an important joint effort."

"I think going home is always a very, very special time," she added.

For Bokwe Mafuna, it is also a time of great anxiety and uncertainty.

"Peace was needed. South Africa could no longer live in isolation," the 53-year-old journalist said from his home in Paris. "But I don't know whether this will be genuine peace. Nothing is settled yet. We are still in a period of transition. Things could still go one way or another. I just hope that people have had enough of violence."

Mafuna's worries go much deeper. He knows, for example, that it won't be easy starting all over again at the age of 53, especially after so many years abroad. Granted, life in France has not been easy either. The former reporter for South Africa's Rand Daily Mail drove a taxi before becoming a free-lance journalist, and today writes a newsletter on southern Africa.

Together with Steve Biko, Mafuna was active in the South African student movement. But he says he was never told officially why the government in 1973 decided to "ban" him for five years. He decided to flee South Africa the same year after serving three months in solitary confinement for failing to check in as ordered by authorities in Johannesburg.

He first fled to Botswana, then went on to Europe. But when his application to return to Botswana was turned down, he applied for and was granted political asylum in France. His wife, who was held in prison during the Soweto riots of the 1970s, joined him three years later in Paris.

Under the new repatriation agreement, returnees granted amnesty by the government will be allowed to "peacefully return to South Africa without risk of arrest, detention, imprisonment or legal proceedings whether civil or criminal in respect of any political offenses."

Although he has these assurances, Mafuna says there is still plenty to worry about.

"When, how, where to go when I get back? No one can give me the answers to these questions," he said. "I'm ready to go back. But like all the others I don't know how to prepare my return.

"I want to go back to build a future there. But I don't know what to expect. At an age when a man normally starts getting ready for retirement, will I get a job on a newspaper?"

Mafuna knows he is not alone in his uncertainty. He noted that some of his friends who had already gone back to South Africa did not like what they found and left again.

"I have friends who couldn't take the return," he said. "They preferred to go back and live in their country of exile. They couldn't stand up to the stress back home. Nor could they take the intolerance; some went back with white wives they had married in exile."

Mafuna's wife is equally hesitant about returning. A former school teacher in South Africa, she is now a Paris social worker. She, too, wonders whether she'll be able to find work in a country where there is acute unemployment.

The couple's two daughters, born in exile, also have misgivings. For them, South Africa is the country of their parents, a country they have seen only on television.

"There's too much violence in your country, daddy," they tell Mafuna. "We're afraid to go there."

Mafuna worries that the voluntary repatriation may be more concerned with short-term logistics than with the longer-term problem of re-integration into South African society.

"Couldn't the return of refugees be better prepared?" he asked. "Couldn't refugees be questioned and asked what they have become? Can't an assessment be done of what they will be bringing to their country when they come back? Return is not a decision that can easily be reversed. It is a decisive step."

Come what may, Bokwe Mafuna has made up his mind. He will go back to South Africa in October, but he will be careful. He will go alone, just to see with his own eyes whether it is really true that he and his family can finally go home.

CHRISTIANE BERTHIAUME

COMMANDO OPERATIONS OR LASTING SOLUTIONS?

The end of the 20th century will be dominated by the flow of knowledge and movement of people. The extraordinary development of communications technology has made movement a decisive variable in the creation and exchange of wealth. It has led to fundamental changes in the modes of production and social reproduction leading to the end of the Cold War and to the reinforcement of disparities between the North and the South, and within each between rich and poor.

The North, composed of a liberal hard core, is made up of large empires (Europe and North America), and the former East Bloc, within which the Soviet Union is breaking up and experiencing serious ethnic antagonisms leading to independence but also to departures into exile or immigration.

The South is composed of Asian tigers, its industrial semi-powers, acting as buffers and hanging on to the North's coat-tails. On the other side is the poor South, on the fringe of the major commercial flows with hundreds of millions of rejected human beings who either leave home voluntarily or are forced to do so.

Thus, exile becomes the only alternative for many individuals or groups fleeing persecution, wars, racial, ethnic or religious violence, and natural disasters, at a time when traditions of solidarity and asylum are threatened.

Nevertheless, the end of the Cold War has made possible the settlement of conflicts and the democratization of certain authoritarian states. Today, many refugees can return without fear to their countries of origin.

In the forthcoming months, UNHCR will conduct a number of large-scale, voluntary repatriation operations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Huge amounts of money and energy will have to be mobilized to ensure refugees a completely safe and dignified return to their home countries. In the past, UNHCR has carried out a number of voluntary repatriation programs. However, the present international political atmosphere, economic difficulties and poverty in many countries of origin, the resurgence of inter-ethnic and or inter-religious conflicts, new demands for human rights and the right to development, make it necessary for UNHCR to carefully heed past experiences.

An innovative, global and multi-disciplinary approach is required.

It is no longer possible to look upon voluntary repatriation projects as commando operations that require a militaristic approach and do not take into account the rehabilitation or reintegration of the refugees. A commando operation is limited in time and demands perfect logistic management, but it does not raise the question of the future of those who have returned home.

Yet the dignity of a refugee depends on the conditions and opportunities offered. A return to poverty is a humiliation hard to bear after so many years of suffering.

To continue, once back home, to depend upon international charity and aid is not worthy of a citizen. To give a fish to a refugee without teaching him to fish borders on contempt and is an affront to human dignity.

Thus, voluntary repatriation must be conceived as a durable solution which takes into consideration both the overall planning of the practical and political modalities of return, and the reintegration of the refugees into the national economy and culture.

Two scenarios

UNHCR's role in repatriation operations is often presented in terms of the duration of its involvement. Should this involvement be limited in time and in scope? Or should it be left more open-ended?

UNHCR / A. Hollmann

The first question refers to operations described above as "commando," whereas the second calls for some form of development assistance. Two scenarios are therefore possible.

The first scenario requires only money and a good team of managers. The only concern is logistics: How to transport people? How to assure their safety? What about their expenses for food, shelter, etc.? These are spectacular, media-rich operations: they can have a colossal impact on the image and reputation for efficiency of the managing institution.

But for refugees they are, even in the short run, a "trap." To leave one dead end to end up in another is a terrible thing, because the high hopes attached to going home disappear.

It is a well known scenario. It has been the prevailing method. It grabs the attention of the media: quick, effective and... on to the next one!

The second method suggests a scenario where complexity is at the heart of the matter.

This scenario suggests that refugees be looked upon as people and not objects, as citizens and not pariahs, as human beings aspiring to peace and well-being.

Agents of development

Their return gives rise to a spate of questions whose analysis requires a multi-disciplinary approach. The refugees become citizens-agents of development. Their future, their security are linked to the objective and subjective conditions that they will find at home. Humanitarian organizations should:

– ensure their rehabilitation and integration into the development of their region, of their country;

– create the psycho-cultural conditions for their reintegration into their own culture, while enabling them to make use of acquired knowledge, of the exposure to other cultures during their exile. The refugees must become agents of change, particularly women because of their role in education. This philosophy of return is fundamental, since it inserts returnees into the ongoing development process, or makes them the driving forces for change in their villages or neighborhoods. Hence, the importance of education and training during exile.

Humanitarian action must not be aimed solely at the mere survival of refugees. It must, from the outset, set as its objective the creation of conditions of return "in complete safety and dignity".

This vision requires UNHCR to develop not only leadership in the protection of refugees during exile, but also the role of catalyst in finding lasting solutions.

Knowledge and expertise in development are an unavoidable necessity within UNHCR. The strengthening of relations and cooperation with other United Nations bodies, such as UNDP, ILO, the World Bank and IFAD, have become indispensable.

For example, as soon as camps are established, it should be possible to set up training programs and create income-generating activities, with a eye on the eventual return to the home country or integration into the host country. The fact that most refugees are from rural areas requires UNHCR to have at its disposal rural development experts capable of working together with other humanitarian agencies on the formulation and implementation of projects.

UNHCR cannot do without development experts if it intends to master the voluntary repatriation process.

If UNHCR believes it should become involved in lasting solutions, it must give priority to the development of a specific comprehensive strategy for voluntary repatriation.

MARIE-ANGELIQUE SAVANE
Special Advisor to
the High Commissioner

UNHCR AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

The New World Order is fast becoming a household word.

Despite the fact that those who coined the term still haven't told us what it means, I will make a high-risk attempt here to define the key role the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees could play in this New World Order.

Any New World Order will endure and be relevant only to the extent that it is about people, and not just about governments. It will be stable and productive only to the extent that governments, and intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations, mold into that order mechanisms for meeting the legitimate needs and aspirations of all peoples.

The foggy rhetoric about the New World Order has essentially confined itself to the political and security conditions which sounded the death knell of the Cold War - Glasnost, successes in regional peace-making, and the extraordinary political-military coalition during the recent Gulf War.

But a truly *New* World Order must now give priority to humanitarian and development components, though it cannot ignore the need for an effective undergirding political/security component, i.e., the peace-making and peace-keeping role of the UN Security Council.

Under this New World Order it should be possible to deter destructive political upheavals, as well as to treat the fallout from these upheavals with a timely humanitarian and development response. The prospect of tens of millions of needy, internally and externally displaced people, should violence escalate in the USSR and Yugoslavia, offers at least one compelling motivation for such a new order.

So where does the High Commissioner for Refugees fit in all this?

Let us take Liberia, as an example. Here the humanitarian/development component of the New World Order was needed, and its absence resulted in failure. UNHCR, under former High Commissioner Thorvald Stoltenberg, gets an "A" for its efforts with the OAU and concerned governments on *root causes* of this African tragedy. Few, if any, previous High Commissioners even thought it was proper for them to deal with root causes.

But, in addition to pounding the desks of world leaders about root causes, UNHCR had a higher responsibility to pound the desk of the UN Secretary-General to insist on a coordinated, rationalized international response. UNHCR abdicated its principal agency responsibility by not insisting that the four UN agencies involved - UNDP, WFP, UNDRO and UNHCR - be forged into a centrally directed UN task force to relieve the misery of over 400,000 internally and externally displaced Liberians.

In all these cases the United Nations either failed, or was marginally productive. Why ?

UNHCR should have been the first to sound the alarm at seeing four UN agencies moving out through the fog along separate, uncoordinated, and often divergent paths. It was UNHCR's responsibility to insist on central direction and coordination in New York and in the field - even if it were not named the lead agency.

We know what happened, and is happening, in Liberia. Most would like to forget it. Those who are reminded tend to excuse it by saying that the UN barons can never be expected to act logically or subject themselves to central direction. They are too preoccupied by their mandates, their turfs, and their fierce competition for resources. And, any New World Order probably would stop short of the changes needed to fix something as badly broken as is the UN's humanitarian response system.

Not necessarily. We have already seen an example of the humanitarian component needed in the New World Order - and it works. It was in October 1984 that the UN Secretary-General was persuaded to appoint a leader to deal with catastrophic drought and human misery in Africa. Two weeks later, he convened the UN member states in New York and announced the Organization for Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA), and its leader, Bradford Morse.

This bold, but logical response stands, even to this day, as the high water mark of the United Nations. The United Nations, and the international system, need never have been the same again.

Why then are things just the same? Why have we learned nothing constructive from OEOA - something that might have helped with internally displaced persons in Angola and Mozambique; with Southern Sudan; with Liberia; with the guest workers escaping Iraq and Kuwait to Jordan; with the Kurds and Shiites in the Persian Gulf?

In all these cases the United Nations either failed, or was marginally productive. Why ?

The answer is lack of leadership. And not necessarily the Secretary-General's, as he rarely goes beyond what member states require of him. So member states are the key culprits. But, while we wait for them to awaken, is there no healing, no vision, no creative leadership elsewhere within the UN system?

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is demonstrating creative leadership. IOM, with the Jordanian Government and the NGOs, salvaged much of the guest worker situation in Jordan, after the United Nations nearly lost it in September 1990. And IOM is rightfully planning its role in a New World Order. But while IOM must play an important role in any reformed humanitarian architecture, it is not part of the United Nations.

Providing creative leadership from *within* the UN system is where the High Commissioner for Refugees comes in. From what I know of Sadako Ogata's fiber and vision, I would expect her to say "Why not?" rather than "Why me?"

She and any future High Commissioner could take heart from at least one precedent which demonstrates that a UN baron (or baroness) *can* lay aside petty turf concerns and literally shake the system from within.

It is little known, but true, that UNICEF's James Grant personally shook the system, and meeting alone with the Secretary-General achieved creation of the UN's high water mark previously mentioned – OEOA.

The High Commissioner for Refugees often has an interest wider and deeper than James Grant had when he pushed for a unitary response in Africa in 1984. Acute human need is often substantially refugee in nature, putting UNHCR in the principal agency position. Rather than insisting on independence (because of the sacred protection mandate) a High Commissioner has both the opportunity and responsibility to insist that the Secretary-General respond to her leading interest in any such disaster by organizing the supportive interagency operational task force that will assure satisfaction of the needs of refugees.

Very importantly, the writ for such an interagency task force covers, as well, responsibility for other externally and internallly displaced and affected persons.

In short, disasters involving substantial flows of refugees give the High Commissioner a direct responsibility to exercise a statesmanship which soars above petty turf battles. The High Commissioner must advocate action on OFOA's lessons, which dictate a unitary international response, requiring central authority tied to the Secretary-General for direction, coordination, diplomatic leg-work, and mobilization of resources.

The High Commissioner should also draw lessons from OFOA's failures. OFOA's (and UNHCR's) delivery to the needy at the end of the line was far less impressive than its successes in New York and affected capitals.

The humanitarian component of the New World Order should not, of course, be confined to emergency response. Rather, it must be viewed as a coherent and comprehensive New World Architecture. It must be an edifice of structure, mandates, and procedure that eliminates the glaring cavities (such as help to internally displaced persons) in today's Old World "Swiss Cheese" architecture. It must change the blind alleys and dead ends in today's UN architecture and make functional those dysfunctional structures, especially at the top.

A comprehensive New World Architecture recognizes and equips itself for the full spectrum of human need. It takes into consideration: human rights abuses; early warning; contingency planning; preparedness (especially through a training capacity – still missing at UN Headquarters though happily alive in UNHCR); emergency response; self-reliance opportunities for displaced and affected people; rehabilitation; and economic development. All of the above obviously need the complements of the Security Council's and other agencies' functions of peace-making, peace-keeping, and peace-building.

Why should the High Commissioner be concerned with anything outside the refugee segment of this continuum? Because, for example, Thorvald Stoltenberg had it right to be concerned with root causes. It is imperative for UNHCR to be interested the moment early warnings of root causes are detected – to permit preparedness and subsequent reduction of casualties. It is imperative

REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS GALORE ...

Hardly a day goes by without some mention by the media of the influx of migrants into the industrialized North.

Reports, debates and statements abound. A wealth of words is used, all too often indiscriminately, to describe and distinguish between newcomers – words like political and economic refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers and immigrants. Figures are quoted authoritatively to demonstrate the steady rise of their numbers. The tensions surrounding the issue are evident in a sampling of recent headlines: "The Poor Invade the Rich West", "Fortress Europe", "Get Out of Here!".

The subject is a headache for European legislators, economists and politicians, and I can but approach it with some trepidation. Nor would I, in the space available here, propose to do more than outline aspects of the problem and some possible solutions.

Europe and especially the Community, like North America, has become a magnet to the impoverished peoples of the East, Southeast and the South. Legal immigration into the region, however, was essentially stopped by the end of the '70s. Creeping recession and rising unemployment in rapidly evolving economies now make it very difficult, politically, for governments to allow immigration much beyond family reunion and the humanitarian obligations to receive asylum-seekers.

Although it is recognized in some circles that Europe's aging work force must increasingly be augmented by immigrant labor, we continue to hear declarations that "the boat is full." While these statements may well reflect public sentiment – and indeed, one feels, dangerously feed into it – they can hardly be considered factual.

Rather, such statements are an indication of the fear of the potential inflow into the region – an influx which may well prove to be beyond Europe's capacity to receive much less absorb.

The disparity in wealth and future growth potential between West and East, and even more, between North and South, is glaring. No reasoned economic, social or historical argument can mask the fact that two-thirds of the world's people live in poverty. Nor can it alter the fact that this poverty continues to provide a fertile breeding ground for intolerance, totalitarianism and war.

The evidence is beamed daily into our homes. It can be analyzed and explained; it cannot be reasoned out of existence. Nor can it be accepted, whatever the temptation may be in some quarters, as some inevitable, immutable law of nature.

What realistic solutions are there to the existing and anticipated mass migration North and Westward, and how can UNHCR contribute to them?

Thus, there are good grounds for concern that mass migration will continue and possibly expand. There is no doubt that many citizens in the Northern industrialized nations fear a huge influx of Third World peoples seeking safety and material betterment. Compounding that fear are concerns that the different ethnic origins and cultural and religious traditions of the newcomers will threaten the very fabric of Northern, predominately Judeo-Christian, democratic societies.

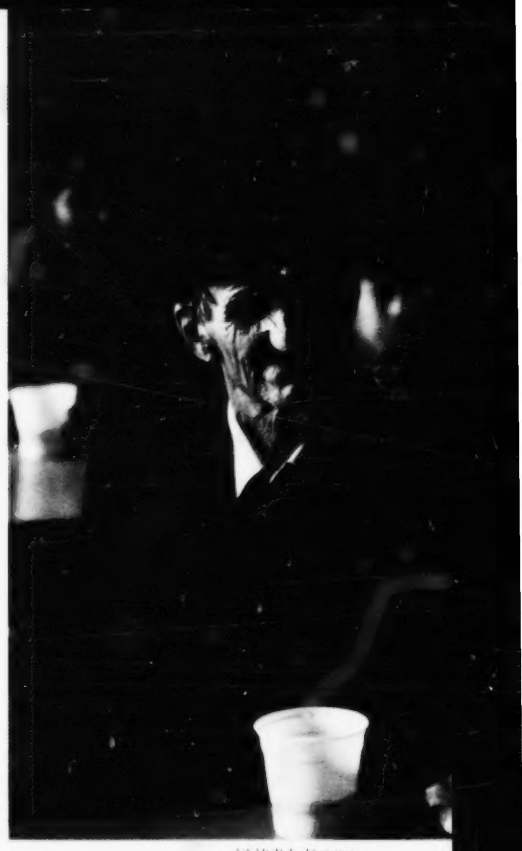
It is not proposed to discuss in these pages whether that threat is real, whether such fears are justified, whether and how a multi-racial democratic Europe may be achieved in peace and prosperity. Suffice to recognize that governments and the governed fear it may not be achievable.

The first, quasi-instinctual reaction to the present and potential inflow has been to try to keep it at bay by setting more stringent conditions on entry into the region and by exercising stricter border controls (even though most recent history has again demonstrated the inefficacy of barriers, be they legal or physical, to hold back people impelled to move).

A series of contradictions and conflicting priorities arise from the course of action adopted. Those which concern us here relate to some fundamental human rights, amongst which is the right to seek asylum. True, no one denies the right to *seek* asylum. But the national measures taken so far and the supranational conventions and agreements to be implemented create a situation in which it will, in fact, be difficult to exercise this right in the industrial nations of the North.

At the same time, the apparent inability to devise and apply national or regional immigration programs to administer even the existing influx has led to a misuse of the asylum procedures set up in conformity with the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto. Increasingly these have been perceived as the only chink in a rising protectionist wall.

To narrow that chink, the definition of a refugee – which underpins the status determination process and is key to legalizing entry and settlement in the region – is being interpreted ever more restrictively. (Hence, I prefer to speak of misuse



UNHCR/L. Dagnino

of the asylum procedure as more correct and honest than to speak of "abusive claims").

The words "is unable and unwilling to avail him herself of the protection of his her country" fade into the background, while the burden of proving a well-founded fear of persecution lies ever more heavily on asylum-seekers. Indeed, the very concept of persecution - certainly in public discourse if not automatically in practice - is being limited to the starkest violations of the *political* rights of an individual.

The absence of the rule of law, rampant discrimination on religious, ethnic or social grounds, let alone blatant and willful economic mismanagement resulting in the violation of the most basic of human rights - the right to a full belly - are deemed not to constitute persecution. No doubt legal minds can amply justify that stand. But is it a useful debate, and would it contribute to resolving the real problems of accelerating migration from South to North and East to West?

There are two reasons for replying in the negative. One is that the problem is not of numbers alone. The 1951 Convention proposes integration of recognized refugees where voluntary repatriation is not an option. Both the feasibility and desirability of integration are put in question today.

The second reason is that the facts of the situation do not support the need for such a debate.

It is a fact that the industrialized nations in the North are not only profoundly attached and committed to the fulfillment of their human rights ideals and obligations. They also, by and large, endeavor to put them into practice, at least where asylum-seekers are concerned.

Thus, while trying to limit the application of the 1951 Convention to a decreasing number of persons, they recognize that a substantial proportion of those seeking admission cannot be turned back safely, are in need of a measure of international protection and at least temporary asylum. Rather than resolving existing dilemmas, the emergence of this new "status" to legalize entry on humanitarian grounds has created further problems. The divergences in defining or assessing the "humanitarian grounds" are one cause of problems. Another is that while entry is granted to a larger number, the difficulties of integration increase without resolving the question of how to deal with persons who are rejected because they qualify neither for 1951 Convention status nor meet humanitarian criteria.

But governments are unable or unwilling to put in place draconian deportation measures to deal with all those they are not able to repulse at the borders. Nor would most of the public at this point countenance some of the heightened police surveillance this would require.

Yet what has been said of France applies to the whole of the industrialized world: it cannot accommodate *all* the misery of the world.

What realistic solutions are there then to the existing and anticipated mass migration North and Westward, and how can UNHCR contribute to them?

Clearly, both the economic and humanitarian aspects of mass migration need to be addressed at their roots, in the countries of origin.

The absence of the rule of law, rampant discrimination on religious, ethnic or social grounds, let alone blatant and willful economic mismanagement resulting in the violation of the most basic of human rights - the right to a full belly - are deemed not to constitute persecution.

ROBERT GILKA

It is now generally accepted that economic development aid must be reviewed both in concept and in practice so as to create the jobs and the markets which will contribute to removing the need or the urge to migrate. Indeed, first steps in that direction are not only envisaged but even, in a limited way, attempted.

Concurrent to this long-term endeavor, human rights requirements must be fulfilled both in countries of origin and in receiving nations. Here UNHCR, alongside other human rights institutions, has a role to assume as well as a mandate to meet.

UNHCR's presence in most of the countries of origin provides a means to do so, but the nature and scope of this role must be further explored. It already plays a role in facilitating the voluntary repatriation of refugees. This can be extended to more active participation in the creation of opportunities and conditions for repatriation with dignity. Thus the lessons being learned in Sri Lanka, Iraq and Albania, for example, must urgently be examined.

Considering the migratory pressures on the North, one would assume that little positive or concrete is likely to be gained from a discussion of UNHCR's mandate, anymore than from a revision of the 1951 Convention, although at some point this may indeed become desirable and necessary. Neither text can nor should be shelved. It is essential, rather, to build on UNHCR's legal and practical competence, its accumulated experience.

This is clearly relevant to the work in progress, both at national and regional levels, to ensure that asylum is granted fairly and speedily to those who need it, albeit on a temporary basis. How to identify them is, of course, *the* question. The broad acceptance of the 1951 definition of a refugee, coupled with a listing of conditions that clearly make a country of origin "unsafe," would be a means to that end. The task of defining these latter conditions is one to which both UNHCR and the UN Human Rights Center could impartially contribute.

UNHCR's role in the establishment of the procedures which serve to identify those in need of protection and asylum is incontrovertible. It has the expertise, the experience and some of the tools to actively participate and constructively contribute to the work on harmonization of these procedures. One of the means at UNHCR's disposal are its data banks on refugee literature and jurisprudence, which it must make available to governments and other concerned parties. Simultaneously, it must further build on its embryonic country-of-origin data base as this, as well as the establishment of more precise and coherent statistics on refugees and asylum seekers, is essential to the status determination process.

In the age of mass information, more must be done by governments, by UNHCR and by other governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations to promote fundamental human rights values and disseminate information on the situation of refugees and conditions in receiving countries. UNHCR has begun to explore with others how best to provide the latter, because too many people have based their decision to leave home and country on the basis of false or unrealistic expectations.

I am all too aware that the preceding paragraphs raise as many questions as they attempt to answer, while a number of related issues have been left aside. Most would require a more in-depth treatment. No doubt **"Refugees"** will provide further opportunities to do so both to this writer and to others.

ANNE-MARIE DEMMER
Director, Regional Bureau
for Europe and North America

ISSUES

PROTECTION IN CRISIS

Forty years after the creation of UNHCR and the adoption of the Convention on Refugees there is serious doubt whether the system introduced during the Cold War is still valid.

This system's primary goal is to ensure that refugees start leading normal lives again as soon as possible, either through voluntary repatriation or integration in a new country. It worked well until the early 1980s.

In the West, particularly in Western Europe, there was broad popular support for victims who managed to flee the totalitarian regimes that had swallowed up the other half of Europe. There was also broad political consensus within the Western democracies that communist or dictatorial regimes persecuted their citizens and forced them to risk death by fleeing to the West.

This link between the West's humanitarian traditions and its political interests was responsible for the creation of UNHCR by the UN General Assembly (despite a negative vote by the Eastern European Communist Bloc) and for the adoption of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 35 of which entrusted the High Commissioner with the unprecedented job of supervising the application of its provisions in the contracting States.

So it was thanks to the Cold War that sovereign States gave UNHCR the right to interfere in a particularly delicate field of their internal affairs: the acceptance and treatment of a special category of foreigners. Thus, a special form of what can be called the "right of humanitarian interference" appeared in 1951.

The founders of the system had a generous humanitarian vision. Yet the system could function only as long as protection of refugees was linked to the finding of lasting solutions to their problems.

In the West, where economies were booming and both manpower and brainpower were in short supply, the primary solution was integrating and naturalizing Eastern Europeans who had managed to flee. In Third World countries, particularly in Africa, the only realistic solution in most cases was voluntary repatriation of refugees, who had generally arrived in large groups. The collapse of the colonial empires and the emergence of new independent States were responsible for the great majority of such refugee situations.

UNHCR/© Associated Press Soldiers

The crisis

From the moment that the link between protection and solution started to weaken, the real difficulties in the system of international protection emerged.

This began to happen in the early 1980s, when certain refugee situations, brought about by regional conflicts or persistent civil wars, seemed to drag on endlessly because a divided international community could not agree on the necessary political solutions. Consequently, sympathy and funds started to dry up, leaving the international community and UNHCR facing agonizing choices.

Two extraordinary developments have altered the configuration of the post-war world, thereby challenging commonly held views of the refugee problem and perhaps even calling into question some of the principles of the traditional system for international protection of refugees.

First, communism's dictatorship was ended in Eastern Europe. A climate of positive dialogue was re-established between most of the world's countries and, in particular, between the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Second, there was a steady increase in movements of populations not only between countries in the same area but also between continents. These movements were largely due to natural and ecological disasters, poverty and growing economic and demographic disparities between Third World and developed countries, as well as to considerably easier inter-continental travel. This category includes those we commonly call "economic migrants."

Such movements were also due to armed conflict between different nationalities, ethnic or social groups, or human rights violations leading to oppression and persecution. Under this category are "refugees" for whom the system of international protection has been developed by regional institutions and the UN General Assembly over the past 40 years.

Most Western countries grant refugee status only to those who formally meet the definition of the 1951 Convention and give temporary humanitarian asylum to those who are not refugees, but whose lives or freedom would be endangered if they were to be sent back to other countries.

Faced with steadily increasing arrivals of foreigners who claim to be refugees and require costly social services, citizens of Western countries have become more and more reluctant to display the kind of unanimous support for refugees as before.

Xenophobic movements are on the rise. Refugees are being lumped together with economic migrants who take advantage of the asylum system.

Some would like to manipulate the prestige of the High Commissioner's Office to make it take the blame for repressive acts against persons who do not come under UNHCR's mandate. Others want UNHCR to exercise its vigilance everywhere but in their own backyards. Some even forbid UNHCR from entering refugee camps.

More and more people in the democratic countries are urging authorities to clamp down at borders and send back all foreigners who do not have a valid reason for entering the country. Acts of violence, sometimes leading to the death of foreigners, have been committed even inside reception centers in various Western countries.

As a reaction to these xenophobic manifestations, various

groups have been formed to defend the humanitarian traditions and obligations of the countries concerned and the interests of the victims of such abuses. Elected officials cannot afford to ignore these differences of opinion and find themselves caught between apparently irreconcilable tendencies.

UNHCR: Caught in the middle

UNHCR has also found itself caught in the middle of these different opinions which try to pull it one way or another, despite the risk of thereby destroying it.

Some would like to manipulate the prestige of the High Commissioner's Office to make it take the blame for repressive acts against persons who do not come under UNHCR's mandate. Others want UNHCR to exercise its vigilance everywhere but in their own backyards. Some even forbid UNHCR from entering refugee camps.

Others claim that they have no obligation to take in refugees because they have not signed the 1951 Convention or did so with a geographic limitation. Yet others deny UNHCR any right to intervene on behalf of persons whom they do not recognize as refugees, even though UNHCR considers that these persons come under its mandate. Finally, some others decide unilaterally to close their borders or send the new arrivals back *en masse* regardless of their obligations. UNHCR is pressured to say that since those involved are economic migrants, everything is just fine. When UNHCR seeks to carry out its mission of protecting refugees on the basis of internationally recognized principles, it is immediately accused of being doctrinaire, legalistic and out of touch with present-day reality.

On the other hand, some would like the High Commissioner's Office to take care of all persons in need.

They think it is pointless to make a distinction between those who need international protection and those who are struggling desperately just to survive.

Others wonder why UNHCR only worries about refugees who cross international borders and forgets about people with the same problems who remain within national borders.

Why not also help the local populations where the refugees live, as their needs are every bit as great as those of the refugees?

Many cannot see why UNHCR should accept a situation where persons who have been classified as refugees in some parts of the world and assisted by the international community stop being recognized as refugees once they make it to other parts of the world.

Searching for an answer

UNHCR is profoundly aware that two fundamental considerations must guide its behavior in everything it does:

- it can succeed only with the trust and close cooperation of authorities in the countries concerned;
- it can be useful to governments and refugees only if its moral authority is recognized and respected by all.

UNHCR's moral authority is based solely on the humanitarian character of its mission and the integrity of its interventions. It is clear that this humanitarian mission takes place in a highly political environment. Yet UNHCR would no longer be able to carry out its mission in the world if

it were accused of practicing political or financial opportunism or of having a double standard for different countries. This is why UNHCR sometimes needs to go public with its recommendations or its opposition to the treatment of refugees in a given situation.

To do a more effective job of serving refugees in cooperation with governments, UNHCR must be as imaginative as it can and search far afield for new approaches and new concepts that respond to the developments and realities of the moment, including the legitimate concerns of the countries involved. Yet it must never forget the fundamental mission entrusted to it by the UN General Assembly.

Spectacular progress has been made in re-establishing a positive dialogue between States and improving the functioning of various mechanisms provided for by the UN Charter. This gives UNHCR and the international community extraordinary opportunities to find imaginative or even daring ways of serving both refugee populations and the States concerned.

Refugee outflows should not be lumped together with migratory movements. In practice, however, people often mix up these different kinds of population movements. The strong migratory pressures which have been building up between the countries of the South, from South to North and from East to West, have become one of the major problems facing mankind at the end of this century, and directly affect the system designed to ensure that refugees enjoy international protection.

This being so, it would be desirable for the various national or international humanitarian structures dealing with all forms of population movements to come up with a global, comprehensive and complementary strategy. In this way they could find the best solutions to various forms of population movements, including refugees, returnees and those displaced within their own country.

When the world was divided into two blocs, it was unrealistic to try to eliminate the root causes of refugee movements. Accordingly, a remedial approach was adopted that targeted countries of asylum. Yet, the country of origin is very often primarily responsible for refugee outflows.

There is a real need for the international community to develop warning systems so that it can rapidly determine the nature of the exodus

UNHCR would no longer be able to carry out its mission in the world if it were accused of practicing political or financial opportunism or of having a double standard for different countries. This is why UNHCR sometimes needs to go public with its recommendations or its opposition to the treatment of refugees in a given situation.

and take the right steps. In the case of refugee outflows, the policy-making bodies of the international community may have to intervene to restore respect for human rights in the country of origin. They may have to encourage dialogue between the parties in conflict and promote the re-establishment of peace and security in the region in question.

In the present favorable political climate, the international community must have the courage to succeed in its mission of peace and security by using all means to which it has access in the context of the United Nations Charter. Most of the actions required are clearly outside the reach of UNHCR. But, UNHCR must be prepared to act as a catalyst promoting establishment of a climate that encourages refugees to return, or helps persuade would-be refugees to stay, in peace and security, at home.

UNHCR must be ready to participate in the implementation of such measures, even in the country of origin, provided that the humanitarian nature of its mission is not compromised, and the refugees' right to seek asylum in another country and the principle of *non-refoulement* are not violated.

Wherever mass departures occur and people flee from natural calamities, ecological disasters or poverty, the international community must coordinate efforts to provide massive aid to the countries concerned, in order to create or re-establish the social and economic conditions that will allow people to lead normal lives in their own lands.

Here, the financial and development assistance institutions of the international community should do the job they were meant to do. When mass population movements are triggered by calamities or by poverty, UNHCR can make, under certain conditions, its humanitarian expertise available during the emergency period until appropriate or specially created organizations take over.

Rapid action by the international community in such cases can prevent political crises which may turn into refugee outflows.

Such exoduses and the way refugees are treated in countries of asylum are problems which come under the heading of human rights. The UN has several mechanisms designed to promote respect for human rights throughout the world, contained in various international instruments, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Throughout the Cold War, these UN mechanisms were not able to function as they were intended. It was always easy to find a majority to denounce a few countries, such as Israel, Chile, South Africa and Uganda, but it was difficult for a majority of governments to agree on the principal violators of human rights.

Thanks to recent changes around the world, there is reason to hope that UN human rights mechanisms will now be able to operate as planned. Both the international community and UNHCR must start making maximum use of such mechanisms to ensure respect for certain fundamental rules in both countries of asylum and countries of origin. A well-informed public can help ensure that governments respect their obligations.

Public opinion in countries of asylum must be able to clearly distinguish between economic migrants and refugees and the treatment which must be accorded each category.

Reliable and credible information mechanisms on conditions in countries of origin must be developed in order to get a more accurate view of the situation of persons who leave these countries or to decide on measures needed to assist these countries and help them stabilize their populations. In some cases, it will be necessary to reach would-be immigrants directly to give them an accurate description of the situation in which they might find themselves.

Developing this global strategy is the urgent challenge facing both the international community and UNHCR.

Going one step further

UNHCR strongly encourages in-depth efforts at coordination on these various subjects and welcomes initiatives at both regional – in particular in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe – and international levels, especially within the framework of the United Nations. It is particularly pleased to see that steps have already been taken in Europe to harmonize and integrate policies in different fields, especially human rights, refugees and migration.

The Council of Europe has obtained impressive results in the human rights field by setting up a Human Rights Commission and a European Court of Human Rights. Several instruments have also been developed in connection with asylum and refugees, but the results have not yet been as spectacular as those for human rights. Recently, following an Austrian proposal, an initiative was launched within the Council of Europe to deal with East-West population movements. This process should be strongly encouraged and could lead to adoption of joint policies and common criteria for asylum, refugees and migration in Europe.

UNHCR also welcomes the process of harmonization initiated by EC countries with regard to asylum, refugees and immigrants. Two conventions have already been adopted, and a third is in the drafting stage. UNHCR has asked to be involved in their implementing mechanism whenever questions dealing with asylum and refugees are considered.

Slowly but surely, harmonization is gaining ground at the EC level and within the Council of Europe. We are convinced that this trend will turn

Public opinion in countries of asylum must be able to clearly distinguish between economic migrants and refugees ...

out to be very positive over the long run for refugee law and for the protection of refugees in Europe and throughout the world.

Yet perhaps we need to go one step further. In light of the movements beginning in Eastern Europe, perhaps we should consider setting up at the regional level (European Community, Council of Europe) a Commission on Refugees and Migration that could become the appropriate forum for developing coordinated policies on asylum, refugees and migration in the region. Why not also request the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe to consider these issues and agree on a set of practical and coordinated measures?

Why not set up a working group composed of leading public figures and qualified experts from different parts of the world which, in agreement with the UN Secretary General, would propose a global strategy on asylum, refugees and migratory flows?

Why not set up a committee of Wise Persons, chaired by a universally respected Head of State and made up of a small number of interested heads of government and ministers from throughout the world, to approve the plan of action hammered out by the working group and make sure it is adopted by the greatest possible number of regional or international bodies?

Perhaps the time has come to ask the UN General Assembly to reaffirm UNHCR's mission of protection in light of the developments of the past 40 years, or to modify its mandate in order to eliminate any ambiguity.

Why not convene a ministerial meeting, for the entire world, to study all the types of action or measures proposed by the working groups from different countries or bodies? Naturally, this ministerial meeting would aim to adopt a global plan of action on asylum, refugees and migratory flows, together with appropriate reform of existing structures.

Perhaps the time has come to ask the UN General Assembly to reaffirm UNHCR's mission of protection in light of the developments of the past 40 years, or to modify its mandate in order to eliminate any ambiguity.

The challenges are indeed great. The international community will overcome them only if the highest political authorities in various countries understand the primary importance of these problems and that it is in their national interest to solve them in the most just and humane fashion. As modern history has shown, the issues at stake are peace and security throughout the world.

MICHEL MOUSSALLI
Director,
International Protection

A VIEW FROM THE PRESS GALLERY ...

When I arrived in Geneva to have a look around my new posting shortly before Christmas 1987, there was a distinct smell of burning in the air – 137,000 copies of REFUGEES magazine had gone up in smoke. Why? An internal row over a feature critical of West German refugee policy had led to the extraordinary decision to burn the entire edition.

When I came back in the spring, the metaphorical blue smoke curling over UNHCR Headquarters had disappeared but the impact of that act of censorship considerably tarnished UNHCR's image both for myself and for many of my colleagues within the press corps.

Older hands in the press room compare the incident to others which have badly affected morale and damaged the reputation of the organization. Amongst them, the failure in 1978 to protest when 40,000 people were pushed back over a border into a minefield, the many examples of boat people being pushed back out to sea in South East Asia, the plight of asylum seekers deported from European airports.

There are a host of other examples from virtually every country in the world. It's a sad fact that refugees are often unwanted people. And as so many major political events precipitate refugee movements, UNHCR will always be on the horns of a moral dilemma – whether or not to criticize the actions of UN member states.

I must at this stage say that I have great respect for UNHCR and the work it does. On field visits I have seen UNHCR employees working virtually to exhaustion in situations of hair-tearing frustration and I am well aware that many UNHCR staff risk their lives to protect refugees.

There is, of course, a big distinction between working in the midst of a crisis handing out food aid, putting up tents and saving lives, and the highly charged atmosphere of Headquarters, where politics meet head on with good intentions and a wrong move can dash a carefully nurtured United Nations career.

The fine line which UNHCR must negotiate was demonstrated to me by the lack of an international response to reports that Saddam Hussein was gassing the Kurds.

Why, I wondered, was there no outcry about the Kurdish refugees fleeing these chemical weapons attacks? Now the reason seems obvious. If UNHCR had highlighted the atrocities it would have got little thanks from UN officials working to negotiate a lasting ceasefire between Iran and Iraq.

There are other examples of political expediency, notably in the Horn of Africa, where certain accommodations have been reached with governments to ensure that relief work can go on. There are always arguments to justify a pragmatic stance. Silence or the blind eye may not be honest or morally correct but in the real world there may be little choice. If you cut off assistance because a government exaggerates refugee numbers then you could condemn many men, women and children who undeniably need help.

From the privileged position of a journalist responsible for observing decisions and reporting on their consequences – not having to carry them out – it is easy to moralize. Nevertheless, I believe UNHCR could take a moral stand and occasionally "blow the whistle" on rogue governments and cruel dictators.

Such condemnation might mobilize public opinion and thus influence foreign policy decisions towards doing more to help the displaced. But I fear there are greater threats to UNHCR's independence than simply a reluctance to speak out about situations that are so clearly wrong.

One of the most obvious is the use by governments of their voluntary contributions to interfere politically in UNHCR operations and to impose strict controls on its policies. At UNHCR, this has meant increased pressure to tighten the criteria for conferring refugee status.

Former High Commissioner Thorvald Stoltenberg, in his first speech to the Executive Committee, began to address such issues as the definition of a refugee. I sense that such a debate is accelerating under the stewardship of High Commissioner Sadako Ogata.

In my view, this kind of discussion is vital. If UNHCR is to do its job efficiently and with dignity, it must speak out when necessary against abuse of those it is charged to protect – only then will it win respect as a neutral humanitarian organization.

Modern communications mean that TV companies install satellite dishes on the scene of a refugee emergency at the same time as aid workers are unloading their tents. The speed of transmission and appetite for news, especially if it's bad, mean it is no longer possible to hide what's going on. But the plus side is that the agony of those very refugees UNHCR is trying to help is also brought instantly into the living rooms of the comfortable West.

If the world sees that UNHCR is free to do its job and has not become a tool of the world's governments, then it will provide the necessary support. Such a strategy is a high risk one and there may be casualties. But it's a risk worth taking if UNHCR is to do its job with renewed vigor in the future.

CHRIS POWELL
BBC

NEW UNHCR GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTION OF WOMEN

Women and children are always among the most defenseless victims of any war. As refugees, they are vulnerable and require special protective measures.

UNHCR's Executive Committee last year called for a new set of guidelines for the protection of female refugees, calling the issue a "matter of urgency." The guidelines, to be presented at this year's Executive Committee meeting, are designed for use by UNHCR staff as well as by countries offering asylum.

Women and children make up the largest proportion of refugees, and the exploitation of these vulnerable groups is repeated time and again in all parts of the world.

In addition to facing the same problems confronted by all refugees, women suffer the added disadvantage of being subjected to sexual abuse and harassment. Torn from home and family, often forced into the unfamiliar role of family head, they have to feed, clothe and protect themselves and their children. Some women find that to get even basic things like food, water and firewood they are forced to bribe guards with sex. Other refugees resort to prostitution to support their families, or choose to marry men with ration cards just to be able to feed their children.

Ann Brazeau, UNHCR's senior coordinator for refugee women, says the new guidelines are designed to eliminate many of the root causes of abuse as well as to help those women who have already suffered. "The situation of refugee women is constantly vulnerable," Brazeau said. "They're dependent on others for everything, so there are bound to be abuses. It often happens that they are raped in their own countries before flight. So how do we deal with this? That's what we're trying to tell our staff — how to deal with these problems."

To try to adopt a more sensitive approach, the guidelines call for more careful handling of interviews with women applying for refugee status and the training of more female staff to conduct such interviews. Women appealing for refugee status may have been subjected to sexual torture such as rape and sadistic forms of electric shock. These women find such grotesque experiences too painful or shameful to describe, particularly to a male interviewer, and so may fail to make a convincing case for refugee status.

Moreover, women who have been attacked by military personnel before arriving at a refugee camp may have difficulty convincing arbitrators that they are victims of persecution, rather that random violence. Occasionally, some of those raped by soldiers find it difficult to get refugee status because government officials considering their claims regard such attacks as a normal part of warfare.

Once established in a camp, women are often barred from making day-to-day decisions which could improve their lot — when and where water and firewood are collected, the kind of wood and cooking pots to be used, or the location of living quarters for single women. Relief officials often blame cultural constraints for the failure to involve women in decision making. But before becoming refugees, women often made their wishes known through their husbands or other traditional channels. The guidelines say it is essential that organizations working with refugees should set up new channels for women's voices to be heard.

Women sometimes find themselves victims of attack or sexual abuse within the refugee camp — a place which should be a safe haven. "It could be anyone who rapes them —

UNHCR recommends more female health workers.

refugee men, military officials, the guards if it is a closed camp. It could be anyone in a position of authority over the women. They are totally dependent," said Brazeau. Often, the problem could have been avoided by paying more attention to the design and layout of the camp and its facilities. "When people are in an emergency situation, it's critical that shelters are put up," Brazeau said. "Food is provided and so on, but the common sense things can get missed."

Women may be forced to go outside camp perimeters into areas patrolled by the military, or even instructed to collect water and firewood. Camps are overcrowded and latrines and washing facilities are often far away from living quarters. Most camps are not lit at night and there are few security patrols. Improving such basic physical features immediately increases security for women, and means that vulnerable women — the elderly, the disabled and unaccompanied girls — are less likely to be abused.

Equal access to food is another key issue for refugee women. Lack of food kills on its own, and malnourished people are more vulnerable to disease. Yet decisions about food and its distribution are generally made in consultation with male camp leaders, ignoring the very people who usually prepare it and feed their families — the women. The situation is further complicated because some refugee populations require men to be fed first. Where supplies are limited, it is the women and children who go without.

UNHCR experts have also highlighted the particular health needs of women, which are often ignored or given low priority in refugee camps. Gynecological and family planning services are often inadequate. Basic needs such as enough cloth and washing facilities for menstruating women are overlooked. Serious problems such as infections and cervical cancer, and harmful practices such as female circumcision may be undetected or ignored. Rape counselling programs are few, though many refugee women have been raped. UNHCR recommends that a higher priority be given to these concerns, including the recruitment of more female health workers from among the refugee populations themselves, from the host country staff and from women expatriates.

Refugee women deserve respect for coping under difficult circumstances.

Where women suffer, so do the children. It is not uncommon for UNHCR to get reports of child victims of physical abuse, torture, abduction and arbitrary detention. In addition to being victims of violence, children are often conscripted into armies and forced to take part in the violence. These situations can cause acute trauma for the children involved — trauma that can only be made worse by long spells in refugee camps. If such children are to come to terms with the horror of their experiences, they need special care. UNHCR is setting up programs to train community workers to identify trauma among refugee children and to provide appropriate counselling services.

The thrust of the guidelines is clear. Refugee workers and those non-governmental organizations caring for refugees should be sensitive to the needs of women, and the needs of women should be given priority in the planning and running of refugee camps. Brazeau says refugee women deserve respect and admiration for coping under extremely difficult circumstances. "You can't help but really respect them," she said. "They maintain a sense of dignity given the circumstances they're living under. They're partners, not passive recipients. They often have solutions to problems, if only we'd listen to them."

IAN BURGESS

NANSEN MEDAL WINNERS

This year's Nansen Medal for exceptional service to refugees will be awarded to Namibian Minister of Local Government and Housing Libertine Amathila, and to the late Paul Weis, UNHCR's first Protection Division director.

The two winners will be honored at a ceremony in the Palais des Nations during UNHCR's October Executive Committee meeting in Geneva. High Commissioner Sadako Ogata and Princess Märtha Louise of Norway will present the prize to Amathila and to Julian Weis, the son of Paul Weis. Paul Weis died in February of this year.

The $50,000 cash award that accompanies the medal will this year be split between two projects to aid women - $30,000 for an employment and community development program in Oshivelo, Namibia, and the rest to a second aid project also in Africa. The award this year is provided by the Canadian Government.

Both Amathila, who is a medical doctor, and Weis were once refugees. Their success in the fields of health and law respectively are an inspiration to refugees and those who work with them.

Amathila is the first African woman to win the medal. She won the award for her service to fellow refugees, especially the women and children who benefited from the feeding and health programs she set up in Africa.

Exile

Amathila, born in 1940, went into exile in 1962 from her native Namibia, traveling for nearly five months before reaching safety in Tanganyika, now Tanzania.

She later studied medicine in Warsaw, Poland, and returned to Tanzania as the first woman doctor under the South West Africa People's Organization's (SWAPO) Nationhood Program. In 1971, she went to London to study nutrition at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She also studied pediatrics in Sweden, where she made valuable contacts with officials from the Nordic donor countries that played an important role in aiding the Namibian refugees.

A heavy demand for doctors brought Amathila back to serve the Namibian refugees in Africa. After returning to her homeland as part of the massive UNHCR repatriation in

1989, Amathila was named director for health on the SWAPO Election Directorate and appointed minister-designate of Local Government and Housing. She was formally sworn in as minister on March 21, 1990, the night of Namibian independence and 28 years after she fled her country.

As a government minister and a former refugee, Amathila works hard to improve the lives of the people of her country, 55 percent of whom earn less than $100 a year.

"She is extremely sensitive to the problems of the poor," said the UN Development Program's Namibia representative, David McAdams.

Founding father

Amathila's long service to refugees is matched by Paul Weis' immense contribution to refugee law.

Weis has been called the "founding father of protection," and his long service to UNHCR and the cause of refugee protection make him well-deserving of this title.

Weis was born in Austria in 1907 and studied law in Vienna. He was imprisoned by the Nazis in Dachau concentration camp in 1938, but was able to escape and found asylum the following year in Britain. He became a naturalized British citizen eight years later.

Michel Moussalli, Director of UNHCR's Division of International Protection, said that part of Weis' determination to aid the uprooted came from his own period of imprisonment and years as a refugee.

"He had lived the experience of a refugee himself," Moussalli said. "Nothing could deter him from trying to help and from strengthening the system of refugee protection."

His position as legal adviser to the International Refugee Organization from 1947 to 1951 enabled Weis to play a central role in protecting the uprooted. He helped in the preparation of the 1951 Refugee Convention and in the founding of UNHCR. He was the first director of UNHCR's Division of Protection.

"His work for the 1951 Convention was the culmination of all the efforts that started in 1921 (with Nansen himself)," said Moussalli.

Weis was also closely involved in the preparation of the 1967 Refugee Protocol, which updated the international concept of refugee protection from the 1951 Convention.

Active retirement

He served as a legal adviser to UNHCR after his 1967 retirement and became a member of the British Delegation to the UNHCR Executive Committee, playing an active role on the Sub-Committee on International Protection.

The British Government also called on Weis to serve on the Council of Europe's Committee on Refugees and Asylum, where he served as chairman.

The Nansen Medal, awarded 32 times since 1954, is named for Fridtjof Nansen. It was founded to focus attention on refugees and to give new impetus to the need for international assistance to the uprooted.

A renowned Arctic explorer, Nansen led the League of Nations' first large-scale humanitarian action - the repatriation of more than 400,000 German soldiers from Soviet prisons after World War I. In 1921, Nansen became the first High Commissioner for Refugees and directed aid to more than 1.5 million refugees from southern Europe and the Middle East.

PETER KESSLER

A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The international refugee situation is fast assuming an unprecedented emergency dimension, particularly in the developing countries.

Forty years ago, on the occasion of the adoption of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, hopes were expressed that the refugee problem was transient and could be easily solved. Today, we know better.

In the broader sense, refugees today are more often victims of human rights abuses, armed conflict and poverty, as well as ecological disasters. In 1990, there were about 15 million refugees the world over. Today, there are more than 17 million and the number is growing. Indeed, the crises in the Gulf, the Horn of Africa and Liberia have created unprecedented waves of human exodus and new refugees.

In Thailand, Pakistan and other parts of Asia, the situation of refugees has been similarly difficult and frustrating. For many of these refugees, there appears to be no immediate solution in sight.

As members of the international community, if we do not seriously address and resolve the problems of abject poverty and underdevelopment, and do not institutionalize the promotion and enjoyment of all human rights, our search for durable solutions to the refugee problem will be futile. Hence, enhanced economic development and respect and observance of all human rights will provide truly durable solutions and reduce the number of refugees.

One of the primary functions of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees is to provide international protection. UNHCR's organizational structure is an important aspect of the preparations in dealing with the current refugee crises. It is gratifying to note the rationalization measures undertaken by UNHCR to fulfill its protection mandate through both its day-to-day activities as well as its work to consolidate and expand the legal framework governing the status and rights of refugees.

Continuing crises

In this, the 40th year of UNHCR, it is a sad fact that the responsibilities and tasks entrusted to us are growing. The result is that operations and programs have not been fully met and provisions for food and other facilities have been severely reduced.

High Commissioner Sadako Ogata has had to face one crisis after another. I'm sure that you will agree with me that Mrs. Ogata has faced them with determination and dedication. In view of the critical financial situation facing UNHCR, it is hoped that more resources would be made available to enable it to execute its mandate.

May I use this opportunity to commend the traditional donors for their contribution to the General and Special Programs. Universal recognition of this humanitarian concern is their just reward for a noble cause. More financial contributions, as well as an increase in development aid assistance, are important components in finding lasting solutions to the refugee problem. This support should be on a predictable, continuous and assured basis.

Finally, the challenges that confront us as members of the international community are quite clear. In the short run, we must provide emergency assistance, relief and protection to refugees and displaced persons. In the medium term, we should stabilize them in areas of first asylum and ensure their access to basic facilities. In the long run, durable solutions will invariably involve elimination of poverty, promotion of sustainable development and the establishment of conditions for peace, security and enhanced international cooperation.

Ambassador
EMEKA ANYAOKWU
Chairman, UNHCR
Executive Committee

A DAY IN THE LIFE

The early morning mist still clings to the pine-studded hills in a Central American refugee camp accessible only by small aircraft or a three-hour drive over treacherous mountain roads.

Usually, the din of refugees preparing hot tortillas for breakfast awakens me at 5:30 a.m. sharp. But not today. My body aches for more sleep.

Two nights ago, I returned to the guarded camp in time for the 9 p.m. military curfew and had just curled up to read my book by candlelight when there was a sharp knock on my cabin door. It was a worried refugee health leader. A woman was having difficulty giving birth.

Ducking into the dimly lit refugee dwelling, I could make out the shape of the camp doctor sitting next to a woman obviously in acute pain. Despite her condition, not a sound emerged from her lips.

The doctor explained that the woman had been in labor all day. The baby had turned in such a way as to make natural birth almost impossible.

Since the woman was approaching her 40s and this was her first child, it was a dangerous situation. We couldn't wait for morning and an airplane to transport her to the capital. We had to take her immediately by car to the nearest hospital. I winced at the thought of a woman in labor braving that bone-rattling, three-hour drive down the mountain.

It took all my negotiating skills to persuade the local military commander to allow a UNHCR ambulance to travel through a war zone after curfew. But he proved relatively sympathetic and, after stalling a bit for form's sake, signed the vital safe-conduct pass.

It was 11:30 p.m. before I returned to my cabin. Thirty minutes later, a loud banging on the door shook me out of a deep sleep.

Ten soldiers were on my doorstep ready for nightly patrol – an operation aimed at preventing movement around the camp.

A few weeks earlier, UNHCR had negotiated an agreement with the army under which no patrols would take place without a UNHCR field officer present.

I, therefore, should have felt privileged as I vaulted a fence and followed the soldiers, in the dead of a moonless night, down a hill at a near run. The whole expedition, conducted throughout at a brisk military pace, took five hours.

Eventually, I stopped counting the hills we scaled, the fallen trees we scrambled over, the streams we forded. All my attention was focused on placing each foot in the right spot to avoid a fall, not an easy task considering we were not allowed to use our flashlights.

It soon became clear that my teenage escorts were under orders to

discourage UNHCR officers from accompanying their rounds by running us ragged. But this strategy didn't work. Over the next several months, every UNHCR field officer became fit enough to outlast even the sturdiest soldier.

It was 5 a.m. by the time I climbed into bed for the third time that night. When I received the third knock on my door 30 minutes later, I was beyond surprise.

This time it was a refugee leader announcing that some 200 exhausted asylum-seekers had managed to slip into the camp during the night. I shuddered at the thought of what could have happened had they come face to face with my young armed escorts.

At the school building where the asylum-seekers were gathered, a colleague and I worked furiously until 9 a.m. to establish a list of new arrivals: name, age, sex, family relationships, places of origin.

By 10 a.m., the local military chief found on his desk a typewritten list of 200 new asylum-seekers who had evaded his fast-moving patrols. His young troops must have had a pretty rough time that day.

But my day wasn't over yet either. At 11 a.m., I went to fetch a group of journalists and representatives of European political parties at our dirt airstrip. It was a jolting 45-minute drive over a broken mountain track, but I always found it a relaxing break from the tensions of camp.

The refugees, who enjoyed any distraction from camp routine, flocked to receive the visitors. A refugee band, playing instruments made in the carpentry shop, serenaded the dignitaries. There were speeches and a tour of several workshops where the visitors watched shoemakers, tailors, weavers, tinsmiths and mechanics in action.

They also toured the camp farms, where refugees raised chickens, pigs, rabbits and goats. Back at the airstrip, they commented on the degree of self-sufficiency achieved by the refugees.

Returning to camp, I learned that a funeral was going to take place. I would have to accompany the procession to the cemetery – which was outside the camp grounds – in the event of an encounter with the military.

As burials offered yet another distraction, refugees tended to transform them into rather joyous affairs, more akin to a picnic outing than to a mournful ceremony. Groups of unruly children would tag along behind the procession, while the women brought food for everyone to munch.

Today's funeral was for a two-month-old girl. The young mother walked behind the tiny wooden coffin, her blank face hiding years of suffering and brutal separation. It was a look I would see many times.

The 15-minute walk to the cemetery seemed much longer as I struggled to keep the children from disappearing into the underbrush in search of wild berries. The last thing I was looking forward to that day was spending two hours at the military barracks negotiating the release of a couple of refugee kids.

It was close to 3 p.m. by the time we arrived at the cemetery with its scores of colored wooden crosses. The burning sun had not yet lost its sting, and the parched earth yielded only reluctantly to the picks and shovels of the refugee grave-diggers. Soon, the still afternoon was punctuated with the rhythmic thud of metal hitting earth, the murmur of women's chatter and the occasional laughter of children playing tag.

Two hours later, the men were still digging. The grave was now chest-high, but the grave-diggers showed no sign of stopping.

I asked one why such a deep hole was required for such a tiny coffin. He looked at me with a strange mixture of glee and patronizing indulgence and simply said: "Coyotes."

Finally, the grave was deep enough and the tiny coffin was lowered into the ground. The long, golden shadows cast by the setting sun intensified the solemnity of the moment. Even the children became hushed, staring in awe as the small coffin disappeared under shovelfuls of warm earth.

The baby's grandmother planted a cross atop the small mound of dirt. As she draped a pink and white paper garland around the marker, I noticed that a single tear had etched a trail through the dust covering her otherwise expressionless face.

Returning to my cabin in a rather sober mood, a sudden thought made me smile. I saw myself reading my job description back at UNHCR's Geneva headquarters and couldn't help thinking it might need some rewriting. Today had been a long day.

SYLVIE GIRARD, now with the Public Information Section in Geneva, shared this entry from the journal she kept during her three years in Central America. "A Day In The Life ..." welcomes contributions from UNHCR and NGO workers around the world about days in the field that enriched their lives.

HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL BRINGS NEW HOPE TO SOMALI DISABLED

Sue Eitel could have worked in a big, comfortable hospital, just one more cog in a vast medical machine.

Instead, the 30-year-old American physical therapist is in the wilds of eastern Ethiopia, where she provides care to those who otherwise would go without. The satisfaction gained from helping those truly in need is what prompted Eitel to go abroad five years ago, and it's what brought her in December to Hartisheik refugee camp, home to some 240,000 Somalis.

"As a physical therapist in the United States, the service you provide complements an already acceptable standard of medical care," said Eitel, who works for Handicap International. "In contrast, the work in Hartisheik involves giving some physical assistance to people who otherwise would have none. The level of personal satisfaction is completely different in these two cases, and I believe it's because of this difference that I've been abroad for five years."

Nine-year-old Handicap International is based in Lyon, France, and is now working in nearly 20 countries. Its main focus is helping disabled refugees and displaced persons to become more mobile and less dependent on others.

"Handicap International arrived in Hartisheik in December 1990," Eitel said. "Our goal here is to train an all-Somali staff to make simple walking aids and devices and prescribing appropriate therapeutic exercises."

The training program includes instruction in basic anatomy and physiotherapy, enabling the local health technicians to perform simple treatments and identify those who need help.

Eitel, pictured below, said physical rehabilitation is a concept that is difficult for many people in the camp to grasp, since it offers no medicines and the results are often long in coming. But the need is certainly there.

Handicap International estimates there are about 15,000 disabled refugees in eastern Ethiopia. To assist these people, the organization is developing rehabilitation units in Camaboker, near Aware, and in Hartisheik camp.

In late May and June, security problems forced the Hartisheik project to shut down. The expatriate staff was evacuated temporarily. But the local staffers decided to stay, with the tools and materials, to await the return of the expatriate staff so that the program could re-start as soon as possible.

Eitel said these types of emergency situations sometime overshadow the needs of the disabled. "But when the dust settles," she said, "the handicapped population again come into focus and it is good to see that their individual physical needs have not been neglected."

The Handicap International staff includes two physiotherapists, two technicians and an administrator. The local staff is made up of a social worker, who provides counselling services, carpenters who make the crutches and other walking aids, orthopedic technicians making braces, prosthetic technicians who make artificial limbs, and shoemakers who make orthopedic shoes. Most of the local staff are themselves refugees.

The most common disabilities seen in the refugee population are polio, amputations, hemiplegia, club feet, contractures, and fractures. Many of the wounds are caused by mines. The most commonly needed walking aids are crutches, orthopedic shoes, braces, canes and prostheses.

This program, coming towards the end of the U.N. Decade of Disabled persons (1983-1992), is but one facet of UNHCR's concern for disabled refugees.

ANN PARKER

& Books Films

"Images of Exile" chronicles UNHCR's four decades of work with refugees around the world. Its 124 black and white photos, shot by some of the world's best photographers, tell the tragic story of refugees caught up in some of the greatest upheavals of the 20th century. The dramatic photographs convey the trauma and suffering of exile, as well as the hope and courage that give people who have lost everything the strength to start their lives anew. With a foreward by High Commissioner Sadako Ogata, **Images of Exile** is available in both English and French. Available from the Public Information Section, Geneva, for $25 or S.Fr. 40.

"An Instrument of Peace", produced by the Rome branch office of UNHCR with support from the Italian government, is a history of international refugee protection and a beautifully illustrated guide to the United Nations and UNHCR. It features side-by-side texts in English, French, Italian and Spanish, and more than 300 color photographs and illustrations. **An Instrument of Peace** reviews the long history of people in search of asylum, and describes UNHCR's work on behalf of the world's refugees. It also discusses UNHCR's funding, and the evolution of its mandate. The 288-page book includes messages from UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, Italian President Francesco Cossiga, President of the Italian Council of Ministers Giulio Andreotti and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako-Ogata. Available from UNHCR Rome and Geneva, for $25 or S.Fr. 40.

"Ambassador of Good Will" is a 14-minute film on the work of UNHCR narrated by Goodwill Ambassador Barbara Hendricks. The film, to be distributed worldwide, can be shown in its entirety or broken into brief television segments of two to four minutes. It includes moving scenes from different refugee camps around the world. "This film is part of my contribution towards commemorating the 40 years of hard work that UNHCR represents," said Hendricks, an internationally known opera star. "It is also a testimony to the hope I have for UNHCR's ability to resolve the refugee problem. My wish as goodwill ambassador is to one day find my role obsolete in a peaceful world where no one needs to seek safety in exile."

UNHCR A. Hollinger

" Make A Little Difference"

"If everyone were to make an effort, this world would be a lot better place to live in. Even if me or the class, if we were to make an effort, it would even make a little difference." Taking the advice of Nashak, a 5th grader at the International School of Geneva, UNHCR's Video Team has produced a short documentary about children for children titled, **Make A Little Difference**. Children from four continents recount their experiences and give advice on how to end the refugee problem. Their statements are an inspiration as well as a warning of what the future holds if the problem is not solved. There is something for adults to learn in the wise words of these children.

In his own country they slammed a door on his fingers. Will you slam one in his face?

Not willingly, maybe. But sometimes doors close on refugees because people don't care enough to keep them open.

Exile is the last resort for many victims of persecution and violence. They are left with little but the hope that, one day, they may be able to go home. Or, at least, be allowed to rebuild their lives in a sympathetic environment.

UNHCR is there to help refugees. Your attitude can be the difference between hope and despair. We need your help to help refugees.

UNHCR
Help for refugees
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UNHCR
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Courtesy of the United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees